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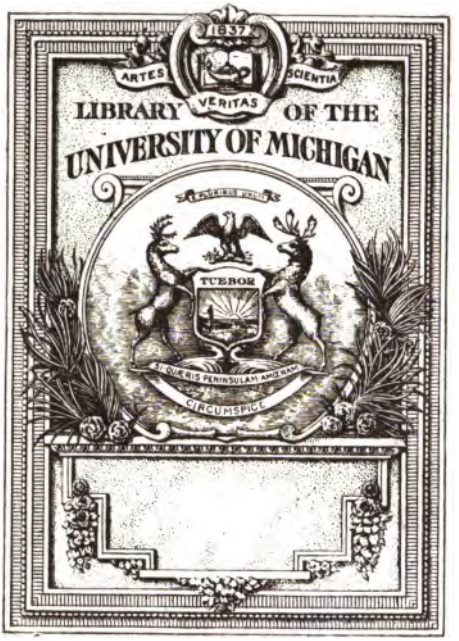
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MASTER SKYLARK

"Master Skylark, thou shalt have thy wish," said Queen Elizabeth.

MASTER SKYLARK

OR

WILL SHAKESPEARE'S WARD

A Dramatization from the Story of the same name by John Bennett

IN FIVE ACTS

BY

EDGAR WHITE BURRILL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

REGINALD B. BIRCH

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1916

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05-7457

To J. E. B.
Whose unfailing sympathy and encouragement
Has been an inspiration to so many,
But most of all to me.

31497

PREFACE

The number of people who have been delighted with Mr. Bennett's charming story of Elizabethan England since it first appeared in the ST. NICHOLAS magazine nearly twenty years ago continues to increase steadily. No contemporary presentation in fiction of the life of that age is more faithful; no other has succeeded so well in reproducing the atmosphere of the times. To the winsome figure of Nicholas Attwood himself there clings a sort of Peter Pan quality which endears him to old and young alike. It is this fine sentiment that raises "Master Skylark" quite above the level of the ordinary historical romance.

At the same time it should be remarked that the story has been deemed of such historical accuracy as to warrant its use in colleges and schools in this country to give to students an adequate sense of the local color of the brilliant Elizabethan age; and to many it has had the effect of awakening an appreciation not only of the times, but of the literature of the period as well. So careful has the author been, in fact, that his book has been used

in England as an auxiliary guide to Stratford-on-Avon, while in Berlin,— for the minute study of all pertaining to Will Shakespeare has in some ways been more at heart to the German than to the Briton,— in addition to the regular German edition of the story, there has been issued a school edition with notes, glossary, etc., for German academic use.

The attempt made here to visualize the story upon the stage has had certain manifest difficulties, yet the continued superiority of this romance to all others in the field has justified such an attempt, particularly on this three-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, when clubs, high schools, colleges, communities, and cities everywhere are searching for dramatic material to use in connection with the nation-wide Shakespeare tercentenary celebration.

Many critics have felt that in the story which forms the basis of the play Shakespeare the *man* has for the first time in literature been adequately presented. In the play more prominence might have been given to the part if it had not been the desire of the dramatist to keep as closely as possible to the original version of the story. For the play, like the story, aims to set before the eye the fabric of the times as a whole; and perhaps the proportion is thus historically truer, since, so far

as we can know, Shakespeare did not make any tremendous stir among his contemporaries. Quietly, unostentatiously, he enters upon the scene when the gorgeous pageant of the century is already well unrolled, and always he is turning to materials and types exploited by his predecessors, though transmuting them with genius. And so in the play, as in the story, we find him adapting himself to conditions created largely by antecedent circumstances, yet unobtrusively transforming the very flow of the events themselves by the impress of his own sweet spirit. It is therefore eminently fitting that this gentle personality should follow on the heels of that lovable rascal Gaston Carew, the bold and tragic master-player, an embodiment for all time of the poet-adventurer, who holds the stage for two full acts and more before he makes his quietus. The shift in dramatic interest from such kaleidoscopic emotions as Carew's to the shining peace of Shakespeare's late appearance may violate technic, but what happier ending could be imagined for any play than the solace of a presence such as Will's?

E. W. B.

New York, December, 1915.

All communications looking towards production should be referred to E. W. Burrill, 600 West 114th Street, New York City.

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MASTER SKYLARK:
WILL SHAKESPEARE'S WARD

MASTER SKYLARK:
WILL SHAKESPEARE'S WARD

OUTLINE

Nick Attwood, a young boy of Stratford-on-Avon and cousin to William Shakespeare, is kidnapped by a company of players that visit the town in 1596. Taken to London, he becomes a famous choir-boy singer, and at last appears before Queen Elizabeth herself. There he meets Shakespeare, and is eventually restored by him to his humble parents. The action throughout is portrayed with historically accurate setting.

In Act I the action shows the simple home life in a Stratford tanner's cottage, and the boy's dissatisfaction with the restrictions of his Puritanical father. Nick has decided to leave his schoolfellows and run away, when Gaston Carew, the leader of the Admiral's company of players, hears his sweet voice and resolves to kidnap him, partly for revenge on Stratford town for having been himself arrested there. An old thatched cottage by a country lane is the setting.

Act II opens with a jovial tavern scene at Coventry, with a typical inn-yard performance of a play, wherein Nick sings. Learning there of his being stolen for good, he tries to escape, is for a time stoutly defended by a blacksmith to whom he flies, but finally is won back again by the blandishments of Carew.

Act III takes place at Carew's house in London, where Nick begins to be attracted by Cicely Carew, the master-player's charming little daughter; he is accepted as head choir-boy after singing for the old precentor of St. Paul's; and is provided for by Carew, whose real affection has been aroused for him.

In Scene 1 of Act IV, Nick sings at the court of Queen Elizabeth, amidst all the glory and glitter of the great Greenwich palace throne-room; he meets Shakespeare, and is taken under his charge. Carew is taken to Newgate Jail for stabbing a fellow-player, and in Scene 2 Nick goes to say good-by to him there, in the semi-darkness of a gloomy corridor of cells. At the end of this brief drop-curtain scene, he is again kidnapped by Carew's disreputable servant.

Act V occurs in Shakespeare's rose-garden, "New Place," Stratford, at early dawn; Nick and Cicely find Shakespeare and his friends, and Nick is reunited with his family, while Cicely finds a

new father and mother in the tanner and his gentle wife.

NOTE

All the main characters may be taken by seven persons. Carew and Shakespeare, the leading male rôles, can be played by one man, since Carew practically disappears after Act III. Queen Elizabeth and Nick's mother may be taken by the same person. Cicely Carew and the tavern maid may be played by the same actress. Schoolboys, pages, and choir boys all played by the same actresses, or by actual choir boys. Goole and Simon Attwood, the same actor; and this actor may also be one of the players in Carew's and Shakespeare's companies. The other parts, Ben Jonson, Tom Heywood, the carpenter, the tavern-keeper, the blacksmith, the butler, the precentor, the ambassador, and the two prison guards — may all be taken successively by two persons. Total necessary characters (including three actresses for choir boys, pages, and schoolboys) — ten. Courtiers and citizens may be supplied locally, the elaborate, gorgeous, but always beautiful costumes of these brightest and wittiest of all courtly days being the most striking feature necessary for their make-up.

The part of Nick, a boy of twelve to fourteen

years, should be taken by an actress possessed of a sweet voice though by no means necessitating a professional singer. Or a choir boy of some histrionic ability would do. He sings a famous lyric by Shakespeare, Heywood, or some other Elizabethan in each act, and upon the sweetness and childlike charm of these five songs depends much of the effectiveness of the play.

. . . . . .

If it is desired to shorten the acting-time of the play, an abbreviation of the fifth act is included, which is half the length of the regular version.

THE PLAY

CHARACTERS

SIMON ATTWOOD, a Stratford tanner

MARGARET ATTWOOD, his wife

NICHOLAS ATTWOOD, afterwards called *Master Skylark*, their son

GASTON CAREW, the Master-Player of the Lord High Admiral's Company

CICELY CAREW, his daughter

GREGORY GOOLE, Carew's disreputable servant

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,

BEN JONSON,

THOMAS HEYWOOD,
And other players

QUEEN ELIZABETH

A carpenter mason; a tavern-keeper; a blacksmith; a butler; a maid; a precentor; schoolboys, choir boys, and pages; guards; courtiers; citizens; etc.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.— A country lane outside the Attwoods' cottage at Stratford-on-Avon, the last of April, 1596.

ACT II.— A tavern room in Coventry.

ACT III.— A room in Carew's house, London.

ACT IV.—

Scene 1: Throne room of the Greenwich Palace, London.

Scene 2: A corridor in Newgate Jail (Drop-curtain scene).

ACT V.— The rose-garden back of Shakespeare's house, "New Place," Stratford.

TIME INTERVAL: One night passes in Act I, indicated by the descent of the curtain in mid-act, for a moment. Four days between Acts II and III. Eight days between Acts III and IV. Five days between Acts IV and V.

ACT I

[*Late afternoon in 1596, the last day of April. A country lane, running diagonally across the stage, in front of a thatched cottage, which is to the right. Between the lane and the cottage is a low stone wall, with a loose-hung gate in the middle. Between the wall and the cottage is an open lawn, most of which is visible. On the left of the stage, at the side of the lane, is an English hedge, over the top of which, at some distance, can be seen the Swan Inn and other houses of Stratford-on-Avon.*

The cottage has a large, low window and a wide open doorway, through which are visible a plain wooden table, a rough bench, three stools, and a smoldering hearth-fire. The house has no chimney. The black beams of the walls show up against the yellow plaster. There are rushes upon the floor; painted cloth hangings on the wall, representing the Prodigal Son, in a dingy blue coat, and the brownish Red Sea, with Pharaoh's inky hosts; also the maxims — "Do No Wrong," "Beware of Sloth," "Overcome Pride," and "Keep an Eye on the Pence."

As the curtain rises, from the highroad — the edge of which is barely visible to the audience at the left back corner of the stage — into which this lane evidently leads, comes a confused murmur of voices. Distant trumpet heard. Silence; then increased excitement. Enter two boys, running up the lane.]

1 BOY. We be in time! They be na here yet! [*Enter, another boy.*]

2 BOY. They 're coming! they 're coming!

3 BOY. Who? Who?

1 BOY. The Admiral's Players. Come on! [*Exeunt.*]

[*The sound of many horses' hoofs on a bridge not far away. A fanfare of trumpets. Enter,* HODGE, *a clownish lout of a boy, puffing up the lane. Enter, at the doorway, from an inner room,* MARGARET ATTWOOD, *poorly but neatly dressed in a worsted gown with a falling linen collar, and with a soft silken coif upon her grayish hair.*]

HODGE. Be it truly the players, Mistress Attwood?

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Aye, Hodge; 't is the players from London, sure enough. See, yon they come.

HODGE. Eigh! My stars! There be a heap on 'em! [*Exit running, and crying out.*] They 're coming! They 're coming! The players be coming! Hurrah!

[*Voices cheering. Music of kettledrums, cymbals, trumpets, flutes, etc., begins, as a line of men in court attire, with resplendent banners bearing the legend, "Ye Players of the Lord High Admiral," and long leveled trumpets, pass along the edge of the highroad across the left back corner of the stage, to the accompaniment of dust and of trampling horses. Then men's voices singing:*]

SONG. [*Outside, increasing, then dying away.*]

The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
Sing merrily we, the hunt is up!
The wild birds sing,
The dun deer fling,
The forest aisles with music ring!
Tantara, tantara, tantara!

Then ride along, ride along,
Stout and strong!
Farewell to grief and care;
With a rollicking cheer
For the high dun deer
And a life in the open air!

Tantara, the hunt is up, lads;
Tantara, the bugles bray!
Tantara, tantara, tantara!
Hio, hark away!

[*The music, cheering, and trampling has nearly died away, when, enter* NICHOLAS ATTWOOD, *excitedly, running down the lane.*]

NICK. [*Catching his breath.*] Oh, Mother!

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Embracing him.*] Aye, Nick.

NICK. Didst see it, Mother?

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Aye, my lad.— Was it thou by the bridge there, with Robin?

NICK. Yes, Mother. Upon the very highest coping-stones. And I counted two and twenty horses, though Robin saith there were but twenty-one.— Didst see the drummer?— Oh, he was the finest of them all. What fine fellows they be! — Hurrah for the Lord High Admiral's men!

[*Enter,* SIMON ATTWOOD, *by a flag-stoned path from behind the cottage. He is a gaunt, sullen man, his doublet of serge, leathern apron, and fustian hose all stained with liquor from the tannery vats.*]

ATTWOOD. Do I hear thee praising these vagabond play-actors? Soul and body o' man, let 's ha' na more on 't.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Why, Simon, the lad was but —

ATTWOOD. I know, I know. But we poor, honest folk of Stratford must slave to pay for the new-fangled notions these sorry fools bring up from London-town.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Why, Simon, what aileth thee to-night?

ATTWOOD. Why, look 'e, now. Here 's all our burgesses o' the town council ordered me to build a chimley on my house, because, forsooth, it is the *fashion* now in London! I must build my fire in a pipe, or pay ten shillings fine! Pah! [*He goes into the cottage.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Speaking to him through the doorway.*] Nay, but Simon; 't will be very handy when the snows come and the east winds blow.— Dame Hathaway saith she is as cozy as a chick in an egg with hers.

NICK. Aye, Mother, and 't will be fine to read with thee before a fire that does na fill the room wi' smoke.

ATTWOOD. [*Within.*] Well, this litter will ha' to be all took out. Atkins will be here at six i' the morning to do the job.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. The rushes need a changing anyway, Simon. Nick shall take the hangings down to-night, and right things up when the chimley 's done, wilt thou not, Nick?

NICK. Aye, Mother.

ATTWOOD. [*Coming out.*] Then let him be about it.— A man can no more eat his meals in peace in his own house. Things ha' come to a pretty pass — a pretty pass indeed.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Do na fret thee, Simon. We 'll sup without, until the work be done. The air is sweet and gentle with the spring.— Come, Nick, we 'll set the table yonder.

[*Exit* ATTWOOD. MARGARET ATTWOOD *and* NICK *bring out the table, which is now seen to consist of two trestles and a wide board, and place it out upon the grass. She tenderly kisses* NICK.]

There! — Thou art mine own good little son, and I will bake thee a cake in the new chimley on the morrow for thy May-day feast.

[*She goes about preparing the supper, while* NICK *can be seen inside, putting a stool upon the bench to reach the topmost hangings on the wall. He is humming the air of the players' song.*]

NICK. [*Taking down the hangings and embroidered maxims.*] I wish Father would na be so cross.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Nay, child, he has a true heart. 'T is the spent shillings that worry him.

NICK. [*Gazing ruefully at "Keep an Eye on the Pence."*] Aye, and the pence as well! But he need na scold so because I cheered the Admiral's men. [*Comes to doorway with "Overcome Pride" in his hands.*] They be dressed as fine as any lord.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Setting the table.*] Wouldst like to be a player, Nick?

NICK. Oh, Mother, that would I! — Mother, can I na go to see them play?

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Must ask thy father, child. Perchance, an thou art very good, he 'll let thee.

NICK. [*Turning joyfully back to his work.*] Ah-h, 't would be — *Oh!*

[*As he steps upon the bench, he capsizes the stool, which falls to the floor with a heavy thump. He jumps down, laughing. Reënter* ATTWOOD, *wiping his face and hands on a coarse towel.*]

ATTWOOD. What madcap folly art thou up to now?

NICK. I be up to no folly at all, sir. I upset the stool. There 's no harm done. [*He quickly hides "Beware of Sloth," which he still holds in his hand.*]

ATTWOOD. Then be about thy business.— Let us ha' supper quickly, Margaret; I must away to bargain wi' Atkins. He shall do it more cheaply than he saith. [*He seats himself moodily on a bench by the doorway.* MARGARET ATTWOOD *comes out with a jug of milk, which she adds to the loaf of rye bread, the cheese, and lettuce already on the table. She glances once or twice at* ATTWOOD *half-fearfully, and with her finger on her lips significantly, she signs to* NICK *to be careful.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Fetch the stools, Nick.

NICK. [*Entering the cottage and returning with the stools; — to* ATTWOOD.] 'T is ready, sir.

[ATTWOOD *seats himself first.* NICK *waits deftly upon them both, still without a word being said.*]

They say — they say, sir — [*Stops at sign from his mother.*]

ATTWOOD. Well, hast lost thy tongue?

NICK. Nay, sir.— They say the players will act a brand-new stage-play at the guild-hall to-morrow.— It is a very good company, they say.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Encouragingly.*] Where do they stay the night, Nick?

NICK. At the Swan Inn. Sir Thomas Lucy would na leave them come to the Peacock Inn, he doth mislike them so.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Hurriedly, to check further remarks by* NICK *along this line.*] What is the play called?

NICK. I canna say surely, Mother — I ha' heard tell 't is one of Ben Jonson's. — [*Tumultuously.*] The play will be free, Father; it is May-day — may I go, sir?

ATTWOOD. And lose thy time from school?

NICK. There is no school to-morrow, sir, after the morning session.

ATTWOOD. Then have ye naught to do, that ye waste the afternoon in idle folly?

NICK. I will do my work beforehand, sir. [*His hand trembles as he refills his father's cup.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. It is May-day, Simon, and a bit o' pleasure will na harm the lad.

ATTWOOD. Pleasure? — If he canna find pleasure enough in his work, his book, and his home he shall na seek it of low rogues and strolling scapegraces.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*With some spirit.*] But, Simon, surely they are not all graceless! Since mine own cousin, Anne Hathaway, married Will Shakespeare, 't is scarcely kind to call all players rogues.

ATTWOOD. No more o' this, Margaret! — Thou art ever too ready with the boy's part against me. He shall na go.— I 'll find a thing or two for him to do among the vats that will take this taste for idleness out of his mouth.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. But, Simon —

ATTWOOD. Nay, that be all there is on 't. [*Exit abruptly.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Softly, to* NICK, *who stands with clenched hands.*] Nicholas!

NICK. He should na flout thee so, Mother! And, Mother, the Queen goes to the play. *She* —

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*With a tender smile, drawing him to her.*] Art thou the Queen?

NICK. Nay. But — the other boys will go and see it all; and I, on May-day of all the year, to be sousing hides in the tannery vats! — Surely it canna be wrong —

MARGARET ATTWOOD. To honor thy father? — [*Stroking his hair.*] Nay, lad; it is thy bounden duty.

NICK. [*Slowly, wonderingly.*] Mother, art thou an angel come down out of heaven?

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Patting his flushed cheek.*] Nay; I be only the every-day mother of a fierce little son who hath many a hard, hard lesson to learn.— Now eat thy supper —'t will soon be growing dark. I must away to cousin Anne Shakespeare's to make her comfortable for the night.— Poor soul! she hath been bedridden a se'nnight since.— And do thou, lad, when thou hast finished eating, get thy friend Robin Getley and gather new rushes by the Shottery path. 'T will please thy father well, and mayhap on the morrow he 'll let thee go.

NICK. Oh, Mother, thou art good. [*Kisses her impetuously.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Nay, but I love thee, child. [*Exit.*]

NICK. [*Sits down to eat, but after a moment, stops, pushes the food away, and goes over to the hedge, staring out into the dusk towards the Inn, where lights have now appeared and whence a faint sound of singing comes.*] I know he will na let me go! It is na fair! It is na fair!— Heigho! I 'll go and get the rushes. [*Exit.*]

[*The distant singing grows more boisterous. Enter soon three burgesses, with a bailiff, who is a regular Dogberry, followed by the nightwatch, at a little interval behind them, with long staves and lanterns.*]

1 BURGESS. Aye, Master Bailiff, ye see it hath no chimney, and our order was made known full ten days past.

BAILIFF. We 'll have him i' the stocks by noontide if he do na conform.— Muster Attwood! [*Knocking.*] — Muster ATTWOOD! — Naught within. 'S at the tannery, no doubt.— Here 's food set out. 'S wife or son should be to home.

2 BURGESS. Perchance they be in the garden. [*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter* CAREW *with two other players.* CAREW *has a slender, lithe body, rather tall, and is dressed in a tawny silk jerkin. Over one shoulder hangs a plum-colored cloak; he wears high-heeled shoes. His bonnet is of tawny velvet, fastened by a jeweled brooch, through which is thrust a curly cock-feather. A broad lace collar is at his throat. He has a little pointed beard, and the ends of his mustache stand up fiercely on each side of his sharp nose. At his side is a long Italian poniard in a sheath of russet leather and silver filagree. He has a reckless high and mighty fling about his stride.*]

CAREW. By the whistle of the Lord High Admiral, this country air doth like me well. Gad's boons, 't is a fair town, in truth.— Methinks Will Shakespeare's wife should live now hereabouts.

1 ACTOR. Aye; we should be now near the edge o' the town.— Yon must be the way to Charlcote.

2 ACTOR. Where Sir Thomas Lucy liveth?

CAREW. Aye, that "lowsie" Lucy who hated our sweet Will most bitterly. Yet, had he not sent Will packing for stealing of his deer, the

Lord Chamberlain had lost a master playwright.

1 ACTOR. True; but Sir Thomas hath always been an ass; in Parliament as well as here.

CAREW. Stratford burgesses are silly sheep for following his fool lead.

1 BURGESS. [*Reappearing, angrily, followed by the rest.*] How? Who calls us silly sheep, thou bold-faced rogue?

CAREW. [*Clapping hand on poniard.*] Rogue? Gaston Carew, the Lord High Admiral's master-player, *rogue?* — Thou 'dst better pick thy words more tenderly, or it will work thee a mischief.

BAILIFF. Sir, ye may na ruffle it like a high duke here. These be burgesses of Stratford Council.

CAREW. I care not who ye be. I say Sir Thomas Lucy is but the stupid old bell-wether of thy flock. Ye let him drive Will Shakespeare out of the town for a pitiful trifling cause.

1 BURGESS. I tell thee, thou strolling fellow, Will Shakespeare was neither more nor less than a deer-stealing gallow's-bird.

CAREW. How? By the Lord, sirrah, I tell thee that Will Shakespeare is my own true friend, and the sweetest fellow in all England. Whoever gainsayeth it, is a hemp-cracking rascal, and I will prove it on his back with a quarter-staff, whenever and wherever he may choose.

1 ACTOR. Come, Gaston, 't will not serve. Best cool thy blood. Here come others.

BAILIFF. 'T is Sir Tummas himself, from dinner at the Inn.— Now, fellow, thou 'lt hold thy peace.

CAREW. Nay, that I 'll not. Be he Sir Thomas Lucy, St. George and the dragon, and all your silly burgesses, rolled up in one, I dare him come and prove my challenge false.

SIR THOMAS LUCY. [*Entering, pompously, like a sort of Sir Toby Belch, with several followers, after whom come, softly at first, more of the players.*] What means this brawling? — Sirrah, thy fellows are riotously drinking yonder at the Swan.

CAREW. That, sir, is no affair of thine — or mine. The score will be paid.

LUCY. Fie, thou art a saucy varlet.

CAREW. [*Bowing low, laughing.*] Sir Thomas, I take no offense from thee for saying that — it cannot be denied. But when, as High Sheriff of Worcester, thou didst condemn my most true friend, Will Shakespeare, as a vagabond thief, and hadst him driven from Stratford, [*shaking his forefinger under Sir Thomas' nose*] I fling the words back in thy face.

LUCY. Out upon thee! Thy Shakespeare is the greatest rogue of all ye stage-playing rabble!

CAREW. Thou art a Dorking cock, dost not know the truth from a truckle-bed in broad daylight, and art — to thy teeth! — but the remnant of a gentleman to boot!

LUCY. [*Furiously.*] Thou — thou bold-faced rascal! — This shall be seen to.— Master Stubbes, as High Bailiff do ye now deny this runagate rogue's company licenses to play.

BAILIFF. [*Aghast.*] Eh? Eh? Deny the Lord High Admiral's players?

LUCY. [*Throwing off angrily the restraining hand of a half-fearful follower.*] Those were my words. Do thy duty, and see to it well.

BAILIFF. But, my master, this will touch London town. Beware a coil with the Lord High Admiral!

LUCY. Beware thou the forty pounds thou owest me.

BAILIFF. [*Hastily, deprecatingly.*] I have it done e'en now.— Hear ye! Hear ye! [*rapidly, and almost inarticulately at first*] Burgesses assembled — in Stratford town, as Bailiff, made and provided, I forthwith, this 30th day of April, Anni Domino 1596, do refuse said company of strollers, mountebanks, and interluders license to play within the walls of Stratford town, in guild-hall, inn-yard or common.

CAREW. A fig for you all, you silly sheep! [*Throwing his glove in the* BAILIFF'S *face.*]

PLAYERS. [*Crowding in back.*] Ha! Have at him!

BURGESSES. Fie! For shame!

BAILIFF. Fellow! for that I seize thee for contempt of Stratford Council, and hold thee for trial.

CAREW. [*As two of the nightwatch step forward to take him.*] What! wilt take me? Unhand me, varlet, or by the Lord High Admiral's whistle, thou 'lt rue it sorely.

1 ACTOR. Nay, Gaston! Beware.

LUCY. Take him, constable.— These stage-players be all upstarts of the same feather. [*Exit, with followers; the actors steal away with a backward glance or two at* CAREW, *who struggles violently a moment with the* BAILIFF *and his men; then, being pinioned finally, he says, as exeunt:*]

CAREW. This will be a black score 'gainst ye all! I 'll be revenged upon this devil-spotted town if 't costs the last remnant of my tattered honor!

[CURTAIN *descends for a moment to denote the passing of one night.*]

[*Same scene, early morning. Noise of a carpenter-mason at work inside the cottage.* NICK, *poring over a book spread upon the grass, is conjugating Latin verbs —" canto, cantas, cantat . . .*"; *but the noise of the workman inside distracts him.*]

NICK. Master Atkins!— Master Atkins!! — Oh, Master Atkins!!!

ATKINS. [*Stopping his pounding and coming to the window.*] Well, what 's to do?

NICK. Canst thou not pound a little, a very tiny little more softly? A body canna hear himself think for thy noise!

ATKINS. Art sickly that thou canst na bide a good, round, honest noise?

NICK. I have na got my lesson half; and I canna study in a noise.

ATKINS. Then ye ha' idled, and will be well birched for it at school.

NICK. Idled! I ha' been at the hides in the tannery vats from first cock-crow till ten minutes agone. 'T is so I ha' na learned my lesson. [*As pounding recommences, he claps both hands over his ears, and recites "canto, cantas, cantat," in a dull monotone. Noise ceases suddenly; the workman comes out, making towards the rear of the house.* NICK, *who has slowly risen as in despair, slamming the book shut, turns eagerly.*] Wilt work no more to-day?

ATKINS. I be but going to mix the mortar. [*Exit.*]

[*Shrill whistles heard outside. Enter, two Schoolboys, running, up the lane.*]

1 BOY. Hast heard the news?

NICK. What 's amiss?

1 BOY. There 's to be no stage-play after all.

NICK. No stage play? Why not?

1 BOY. Why, the master-player hath been arrested for insult to Sir Thomas Lucy — here upon the highroad yesternight, while thou wert with me gathering rushes.

NICK. Where be the other players?

1 BOY. Fled out o' town in the night, lest their goods be taken by the law and they be fined.

NICK. But whither went they?

1 BOY. To Coventry; and left the master-player behind in jail. But this morning, my father saith, Master John Shakespeare hath wrought upon the other burgesses to set him free, and to give him a purse of gold beside to soothe him.

NICK. M-m! I wish *I* were a master-player!

2 BOY. Oh, but he swears he 'll walk the whole way to Coventry sooner than straddle the horse the burgesses sent for him to ride.

NICK. What! He 's still at the Inn? Let 's go down and see him.

2 BOY. We 'd best be off to school.

1 BOY. Master Brunswood will birch us if we be late.

NICK. He will birch us like enough anyway; a fellow canna slip on a single word without a downright thrashing.— I will na stand it any longer!

1 BOY. What wilt do?

NICK. I 'll run away!

2 BOY. And when the skies fall, we 'll catch sparrows! Ha, ha, ha!

NICK. Ye think I dare na?

1 BOY. Whither wilt run, Nicky?

NICK. To Coventry, after the players!

2 BOY. Wilt, indeed! Ha, ha, ha!

NICK. Nay, then; I 'll show you! 'T is only a few miles to Warwick, that 's half way; and I ha' cousins in Coventry. I 'll not be birched at school for naught, nor worked all May-day afternoon. There 's bluebells blowing in the dingle, and birds a-wing in the fields; and while ye are grinding at your musty Latin, I shall be roaming over the hills, and I 'll see the stage-play after all.

2 BOY. Oh, no doubt, no doubt — with a most glorious threshing from thy father when thou comest home to-morrow!

NICK. 'T is a threshing either way: I 'll have my good day's game out first. [*Starts to go.*]

1 BOY. [*Going after him.*] Wilt truly go to Coventry, Nick?

NICK. Aye, truly, Robin; that I will.

2 BOY. [*As a distant bell suddenly sounds two or three times.*] Hi! hurry; 't is growing late. There 't ringeth. . . . [*Exit, running.*]

1 BOY. [*Starts; turns back to* NICK, *evidently moved a little.*] Then farewell, Nick! [*Turns, running after* 1ST BOY; *exit.*]

[*Again the bell rings once or twice, distinctly, in the distance.* NICK *pauses irresolutely a moment, looks about him, picks up the book he had dropped, and, the bell now having stopped, goes slowly, with half-drooped head, into the house. Some one is heard coming slowly up the lane, whistling. It is* HODGE, *the clownish boy. He stops, peers around half-stupidly.* NICK *reappears in the doorway, with a pewter plate of bread and cheese in his hand.* HODGE *shows surprise at seeing* NICK.]

HODGE. Eh! Nicky, be-est late for school. [NICK *does not answer, but begins to set forth the*

table, putting the food upon it.] — Thy mother maketh rare good sweet-cakes, Nicky!

NICK. [*With his back still turned.*] Aye.

HODGE. Be-eth thy mother at home?

NICK. [*Covering the table carefully with a red cloth, while he answers.*] Nay; she hath gone to nurse Mistress Shakespeare.

HODGE. Whut hast there, Nicky? [*Pointing at table.*]

NICK. 'T is for my father.

HODGE. Lazy-bones!

NICK. [*Sharply.*] He 's at the tannery vats since the very peep o' dawn!

HODGE. A 's up betoimes then. A must be afeared o' the light o' day. [NICK *has gone inside again, not listening to what* HODGE *says. The latter now clumsily but quickly steals a cake from the covered table.* NICK *returns and, cap in hand, without heeding* HODGE, *looks around a moment, half uncertain; then starts off towards the gate.*] — Whur be-est going, Nick?

NICK. To Coventry.

HODGE. To Coventry! — No school to-day?

NICK. Nay; not for me. [*Looks around the place a little wistfully.*]

HODGE. Not for me, nuther. [*Watching* NICK, *cautiously biting, and finally cramming the cake, seeing that* NICK *does not look at him; at the same time continuing:*] Muster Brunswood saith that I ha' learned as much as faither ever knowed, an' 't is enow for I. Faither saith it maketh saucy rogues o' sons to know more than they's own dads.— Why art going to Coventry, Nick?

NICK. To see the stage-play there.

HODGE. [*Staring.*] So! Wilt take a fellow wi' thee?

NICK. [*His hand on the gate.*] Come on.

HODGE. [*Perceiving some lack of enthusiasm in* NICK'S *reply.*] And wull I see the play, too?

NICK. The Mayor's show is free.

HODGE. [*As they come out through the gate, which* NICK *shuts carefully.*] Be it a tailor's show, Nick, wi' a Herod the King, and a rope for to hang Judas? [*He capers with delight.*]

NICK. Pshaw! no; none of those old-fashioned things. I hope they 'll play a right good English history-play, like our own Master Will

Shakespeare's "King John."— He 's become a great man in London town.

HODGE. Wully Shaxpur a great man! Hutty-tutty! he be na great. Why, a's name be cut on the old beech-tree up Snitterfield Lane yonder, an' I could do better myself.

NICK. Aye, but he is great; he 's called the Swan of Avon.

HODGE. Hoh! Avon swans be mostly geese.

NICK. Now look 'e here, Hodge Dawson, Master Will Shakespeare married my mother's cousin. I will na have him called goose.

[*Enter, unobserved,* GASTON CAREW, *at the farther end of the lane. He listens a moment, with an expression of delight growing on his face; then steps aside into a gap in the hedge, which conceals him.*]

HODGE. La, now, 't is nowt to me. But since when hath a been *Muster* Shaxpur? — that ne'er-do-well play-actor?

NICK. Ne'er-do-well! It is na true. When he was here last summer, he was as bravely dressed as my Lord Admiral's Master-Player [CAREW *emerges for a moment, highly pleased*]; and he

had a heap of good gold nobles in his purse, and shillings to give away.

HODGE. A fool an' 's money be soon parted.

NICK. [*Hotly.*] Will Shakespeare is no fool. He 's going to buy the Great House in Chapel Lane and come back here to live.

HODGE. Then a 's a witless zany to leave London for Stratford.

NICK. I 'll make thee swallow those words!

HODGE. I 'd loike to see thee try —

NICK. [*Knocking him down, and bending over him.*] There! Didst see. Now take back thy bluster or I 'll box thine ears besides.

HODGE. [*Sullenly.*] Whoy, if 't is all o' that to thee, I take it back; but [*rising slowly, as* NICK *rises; then, sulkily*] I 'll na go where I be whupped. [*Backs up the lane, as* CAREW *dodges behind the hedge again.*] An' what 's more, thy Muster Wully Shaxpur be-eth an old gray goose, an' *boo* to he, says I! [*Runs up lane, almost into* CAREW, *who makes a feint of stopping him as he dives through the thin hedge.*]

NICK. [*Calling after him.*] Mind ye this, thou lout: when I come back, I 'll teach thee who

thy thousand-time betters be — Will Shakespeare first of all.

CAREW. [*Striding down the lane.*] Well crowed, well crowed, my jolly cockerel! I thank thee for it in Will Shakespeare's name. [*As* NICK *still stares at him,* CAREW'S *manner changes to fierceness.*]— What! How now! Dost like or like me not?

NICK. Why, sir — why, sir — [*Takes off his cap and bows in boyish confusion.*]

CAREW. [*Dramatically, stamping his foot.*] Come, come, I am a swashing, ruffling, desperate Dick, and not to be made a common jest for Stratford dolts to giggle at. What! these legs laid in the common stocks? Nay, nay [*putting his hand to his poniard*], some one should taste old Bless-his-heart here first! — Dost take me, boy?

NICK. [*Hesitating.*] Why, sir — ye surely are the Master-Player.

CAREW. There! Who said I could not act? [*Laughs.*] Why, boy, I say I love thee now for this, since what hath passed in Stratford. A murrain on the town! A black murrain, I say! [NICK *draws back afraid.*] Nay, lad, look not so dashed. That was only old Burbage's tragic

style; and I — I am only Gaston Carew, hail-fellow-well-met with all true hearts. Be known to me, lad; *thy* name?

NICK. Nicholas Attwood, sir.

CAREW. Nicholas Attwood? Why, 't is a good name; Nick — I hope old Nick will never catch thee — upon my word I do, and on the remnant of mine honor! — Thou 'rt going a piece by yonder high-road?

NICK. Aye, sir; to Coventry, to see thy fellow-players act.

CAREW. Why, come, thou 'lt go along with me, then, and dine with us this night at the Blue Boar Inn; wilt not?

NICK. [*Bowing, overwhelmed.*] Indeed, sir, indeed I will, and that right gladly.

CAREW. [*Putting his hand on* NICK'S *shoulder, and laughing gently.*] Nay, Nick, put on thy cap; we are but two good friends and equal faring-fellows here. [NICK *puts on his cap shyly.*] Thy parents,— [*turns as if to approach the cottage*] good souls — I 'll speak a word with them — God save them, for your courtesy! [*takes a few steps toward the house*].

NICK. [*Confusedly.*] Nay, nay, sir; they be both away from home.— And — and my father, sir, careth not for stage-players. He would na leave me go.

CAREW. Not leave thee go? Why, then, I 'll *take* thee, lad.— But we be ill equipped, i' faith, for a long journey. Zooks! I have not broken fast this day. Couldst find some barley cakes and a Banbury cheese to feed this empty pocket? 'T will be high noon and more before we see the spires of Coventry.

NICK. Aye, surely, sir, I 'll fetch some. [*Goes into the house.*]

CAREW. [*Walking over to the hedge and looking off, shading his eyes with one hand.*] Upon my word, 't is as fair a town as the heart of man could wish. Wish? — I wish 't were sunken in the sea! Faugh! they could not buy my silence with *two* score gold rose nobles. [*He lets fall again into his wallet a heavy purse which he has just removed.*] I 'll have my vengeance on them all.

NICK. [*Inside the cottage, singing joyously an old-fashioned madrigal with a warbling refrain, like a lark's song, which may be done mechanically behind the scenes:*]

Hey, laddie, hark to the merry, merry lark!
How high he singeth clear:
Oh, a morn in spring is the sweetest thing
That cometh in all the year.

CAREW. [*Starting.*] My soul! my soul! — It is not — nay, it cannot be — why, 't is — it is the boy! Upon my heart, he hath a skylark prisoned in his throat!

NICK. [*Still singing:*]

Ring, ting, it is the merry springtime;
How full of heart a body feels!
Sing hey, trolly-lolly! oh, to live is to be jolly,
When springtime cometh with the summer at her heels.

CAREW. Why, there 's melting gold in the lad's sweet voice! In London he would soon — Nay — What! — By my soul!

NICK. [*Still inside, but coming out at the last of his warbling trill:*]

God save us all, my jolly gentlemen,
We 'll merry be to-day;
For the cuckoo sings till the greenwood rings,
And it is the month of May!
Ring, ting . . . [*etc.*]

CAREW. [*As* NICK *comes toward him with a crockful of barley cakes.*] Well sung, well sung, Master Skylark! Where didst thou learn that wonder-song?

NICK. Why, Mother learned me part, and the rest — just came, I think, sir.

CAREW. Why, lad, thy voice — But, soft — [*Looks sharply around.*] Thy father is not near? Thou 'rt sure?

NICK. Nay, sir; he 's off at the tannery.

CAREW. Dost know any other songs?

NICK. I know Master Will Shakespeare's "Hark, hark, the lark," and "The ousel-cock so black of hue, with orange-tawny bill," and the throstle's song that goes with it.

CAREW. Why, to be sure thou knowest old Nick Bottom's song; for is not thy name Nick? Well met, well met, I say.

NICK. Oh, sir — I —

CAREW. Nay, I do not care to hear thee talk. Sing. Sing all thy songs. I am hungry as a wolf for songs, dear Nick, and thou wilt sing them all for me?

NICK. Aye, surely, sir. But wilt thou have the barley cakes?

CAREW. My soul, I had forgot the cakes. [*Takes them, and* NICK *carries back the empty crock.*] — I 'll do it! I 'll do it if I dance on air for it! I 'll have it out of canting Stratford town, or may I never thrive! My soul! the very thing. His eyes are like twin holidays and he breathes the breath of spring. Nicholas, Nick Skylark — Master Skylark — why, 't is just the name.— I 'll do it, upon my word, and on the remnant of mine honor!

NICK. [*Having come out again, as he speaks the last words.*] Did ye speak to me, sir?

CAREW. Nay, Nicholas, I was talking to the man i' the moon.

NICK. Why, sir, the moon is not up yet.

CAREW. [*Laughing.*] To be sure; the silvery jade has missed the first act.

NICK. The first act? What will ye play for the Mayor's show, in Coventry?

CAREW. [*Still staring at him.*] I know not, — something to catch the pence of the Mayday crowd.

"What! How now?" cried the stranger, sharply. "Dost like or like me not?"

NICK. [*Greatly distressed.*] Why, I thought the May-day play 'd be free — I have not a farthing!

CAREW. Tut, tut, thou silly lad! Am I thy friend for naught? Why, Nick, I love thine open, pretty face.— Canst thou speak lines by heart? — Here, scan this paper o'er. [*Gives him a paper from a roll that he takes out of one side of his wallet.*]

NICK. Why, sir, it is a part!

CAREW. A part, to be sure — and a part of a very good whole, too; and do thou just learn that part, good Master Skylark, as we walk along together, and thou shalt say it in the day's play.

NICK. [*Gasping.*] What, Master Carew! I? With the Lord Admiral's players?

CAREW. [*Clapping* NICK *on the back, as* HODGE, *unobserved, thrusts his head through the hedge and gapes in astonishment.*] Why, surely; and thou shalt sing Tom Heywood's newest song; it is a lark-song like thine own.

NICK. [*Still amazed with joy, and hesitating.*] But — will they have me, sir?

CAREW. Have thee? What! I am master here. And I tell thee, Nick, that thou shalt see

the play to-day, and be the play, in part — to-day, aye; — and perchance thereafter, too! — But, come, Master Skylark; let us jog along for Coventry. [*Exeunt;* CAREW *buoyantly, one arm lightly resting upon the lad's shoulders.*]

HODGE. [*Emerging from the hedge, staring for a moment after the retreating figures and shaking his fist at them, now runs back of the cottage in the direction of the tannery, shouting.*] Muster Attwood! Muster Attwood! Oh-ee, Muster Attwood! [*Exit.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Entering from the far end of the lane, and coming down to enter the cottage gate.*] Now, who can that be calling Simon? [*Slowly coming on.*] 'T was foolish of me to forget that brew of herbs. [*Seeing the untouched table.*] What 's here? He hath not had his breakfast yet; but Nick hath laid it out for him before he left for school,— my good, dear lad!

[*Cries outside. Enter* ATTWOOD, *from the rear of the cottage, holding* HODGE *by the ear.*]

ATTWOOD. He said to thee he was na going to school na more?

HODGE. Aye, sir, that a did. And a went away wi' a play-actorin' fellow in a plum-colored

cloak; and play-actorin' fellow said a loved un like a's own, an'—

ATTWOOD. He went towards Coventry?

HODGE. Aye; an' play-actorin' fellow said a 'd put un in the play, an' he should sing a song.— Now, le' me go, Muster Attwood; cross my heart, 't is all I know. [*He is released, and exit hurriedly.*]

ATTWOOD. [*Slowly, raising his hand, and letting it fall.*] He hath gone his own wilful way. Let him follow it to the end.

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Breathlessly, coming to* ATTWOOD.] *Simon!* Is 't my Nicholas ye mean?

ATTWOOD. Aye; never speak to me of him again. [*Thrusts her from him sternly with a gesture of his hand,— not physical violence, however; he is an unhappy Puritan, but not a brute.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Still clinging, and reaching as if to catch his hand or arm, pressing towards him piteously, pleading.*] Oh, Simon! Be not so hard!

ATTWOOD. He hath gone away to join a pack of stage-playing rascals and vagabonds —

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Supplicatingly, but hesitating, pausing, no longer striving to cling upon his arm.*] But, Simon!

ATTWOOD. [*He checks her again with a gesture, impressive and forbidding.*] Nay. He 's no longer son of mine. This house shall ne'er be home for him again! [*He goes into the cottage, takes down a huge leather Bible from the shelf, and sits down blindly with it unopened in his lap.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. [*Sinking on the doorsill, sobbing.*] Oh, Nick! My little Nicholas!

[CURTAIN]

[End of ACT I]

ACT II

[*Mid-afternoon, same day. A tavern room in Coventry (the Blue Boar Inn), filled with the Lord Admiral's players, drinking, dicing, playing at cards, and talking loudly, at several rough tables. A landlord and barmaid bustling about, supplying flagons and mugs of wine and ale from a quaint small bar at the rear. The back wall of the room runs diagonally across the stage, from left center back to right front. One door, to the left, opens evidently upon the street, for frequently there is heard in its vicinity the disturbing clang of a smithy's anvil. Another door, in the back wall, to the right, opens upon the inn-yard, where there has been rigged up a rude stage. This is visible partially through the three large, low, small-paned windows, set in the back wall; but later, the tapestries in front of the windows are pulled back sufficiently to allow the audience to see fully the players outside upon the stage. The interior stage seen through the three windows, should be very brilliantly lighted from overhead,*

as if by the sun from the open sky. The fore-front stage, the tavern-room, should be less brightly lighted, particularly at the time when the principal action is beyond the window-openings.

Laughter as the curtain rises. Business with bar-maid and players.]

1 PLAYER. Well, Tom, I wonder how bold Gaston fares.

HEYWOOD. 'T was a scurvy trick to take his horse away.

1 PLAYER. Nay, Tom Heywood; Gaston hath earned naught but his just deserts for his high and mighty speech.

2 PLAYER. Aye; we need not rack our brains; trust that same nimble tongue to fetch him forth.

1 PLAYER. I 'll wager he 's now upon the way [*rising and striding fiercely about, to imitate* CAREW], cursing Stratford at every step he takes, for a vile, moth-eaten, moldy town with whey-brained, slop-jawed, shovel-faced fools for burgesses! [*Laughter.*]

2 PLAYER. [*To* GOOLE.] Look 'e, Gregory, dost not think that thy sweet master will be here anon?

GOOLE. [*Sullenly.*] Nay, I trow not.

2 PLAYER. Perchance thou dost not think at all! [*Laughter.*]

GOOLE. [*Angrily.*] How should I know?

1 PLAYER. Why shouldst thou know? Gadzooks, art not his groom? Was it not thou that took his horse? Methinks thou 'st served him long enow to be hard put to dodge the hangman thine own self. [*Prolonged laughter.*]— [*To* LANDLORD.] More wine here, sirrah.

HEYWOOD. But truly if he come not, we 'll have a sweet to-do to fill his place this day.

1 PLAYER. Oh, trust Phil Henslowe for all that.

HENSLOWE. Nay, we cannot stand his loss one little day, since Burbage weaned Will Shakespeare from us.

2 PLAYER. Gaston will be here in time. Didst not see how Master John Shakespeare, for sweet Will's sake, didst stand by Gaston in the fracas?

1 PLAYER. Aye, truly — and, pat, he comes! [*Enter* CAREW, *with* NICK.] What, ho! [*All look up and shout loudly, raising their flagons.*] We missed ye, Gaston!

CAREW. [*Stepping forward, ironically.*] Thanks for these plaudits, gentle friends. I have returned.

1 AND 2 PLAYERS. Aye. We see that ye have, Gaston. [*Laughter.*]

CAREW. Ye fled, and left me to be spoiled by the spoiler; but I have left the spoiler spoiled. [*He displays the purse given him by the burgesses. Then, laying his hand on* NICK'S *shoulder and bowing to them all graciously.*] Be known, be known all! Gentlemen, my Lord Admiral's Players, Master Nicholas Skylark, the sweetest singer in all England! [NICK *hangs his head in confusion as the players stare at him, in surprise at first, and then with grins and winks at* CAREW. *Some begin to laugh.*] It is no jest. He hath a sweeter voice than Colley Cyril's, the best in London. I 'll stake my honor on it!

2 PLAYER. Hast any, Gaston? [*Laughter.*]

CAREW. [*In a high voice.*] Now, hark 'e, Fulk Sandells; what I say is so, upon my word, and on the remnant of mine honor! And this very hour ye shall see, for he is to sing in the play with us.— Come, Nick.

[*They stare curiously at* NICK *again, but* CAREW *takes him over to a table where* HEYWOOD *and*

"Master Nicholas Skylark. The sweetest singer in all the kingdom of England!"

HENSLOWE *are seated.* NICK *bows to them politely.*]

HEYWOOD. [*Kindly.*] Wilt drink with me, my lad?

NICK. [*Hesitatingly.*] Nay,— if you please, sir. I do na care for it.

SEVERAL PLAYERS. [*Coming towards the table. Same one speaks first and last phrases.*] What! a player, and no wine? — Will he not drink? — Here, thou shalt drink, boy.

CAREW. [*Scowling, and clapping his hand on his poniard.*] Nay, Fulk; we 'll have no more o' that. [*They laugh.* SANDELLS, *who has drawn himself up, as if to face* CAREW, *thinks better of it and draws back.*] Be off, and make ready for the play. The gentry were crowding up the lane even as we entered.

[*A player goes to the inn-yard door and opens it a crack, whereat a hum of voices becomes audible for a moment. He closes the door.*]

NICK. But, kind gentlemen, I *will* drink with ye.

CAREW. There, sirs! — Spoken like a man, Nick.

NICK. Only, if ye please, sirs, I should like it to be a mug — o' milk.

CAREW. Good for thee, my Skylark. We will not have thee burn thy tender throat. [*Calling aside.*] Here, Landlord, milk.— We 'll sup more heartily after thy part in the play. [*Exit* LANDLORD.]

2 PLAYER. But, Gaston, he should sing for us now.

CAREW. Nay, but he 'll not. He must have rest before his turn comes. If any of ye had left a beast for us to ride upon, he should have sung for thee an hour agone. Now ye must wait.

HENSLOWE. But, Gaston, hast heard him sing upon a stage?

CAREW. [*Shortly.*] Hark 'e, Phil Henslowe, and all of ye. I say the boy can sing. And sing he shall, shortly, in the play.— And Heywood, he hath learned thy latest song.— But not a whit before 't is time. Do ye take me?

[*The other players withdraw, and make ready for the play. The tables are pushed back, some musical instruments made ready, and their costumes furbished up and embellished from wallets and saddle-bags. The* LAND-

LORD brings NICK *his mug of milk, meanwhile, and some sweet-cakes. The boy bends his head and murmurs a grace, at which* CAREW *and* HEYWOOD *look at him curiously. The other players stare and smile; but no one laughs.*

A player opens the inn-yard door again. Exeunt others with flute, viol, gittern, cymbals, fiddles, to take their places in the outer balcony overlooking the inn-yard stage. There are outside steps to this, which can be seen as another player inside draws back the window tapestries. Three or four dandies can be seen assembling upon the stage and seating themselves upon stools. A girl moves among them with cherries for sale. Their voices are plainly audible as long as the door remains ajar.]

VOICES. Good-day, fair Master Harrington! — Good-day, Sir Thomas Parks!

GIRL. Cherry ripe, cherry ripe! Who 'll buy my sweet May cherries?

VOICES. Good-day, sweet Master Nettleby! — Good-day, good-day!

GIRL. Here, sirs, sweet sugared cakes and ginger nuts.

VOICE. Way, sirs, way for my lord, the Earl of Warwick!

ANOTHER VOICE. Room here! Room here!!

[*The player lets the tapestry fall again, and the door is also shut.*]

CAREW. [*To* HEYWOOD.] Upon my soul, Tom, 't would seem that Puck had burst a honey-bag in his throat.

HEYWOOD. No doubt, no doubt. He hath a sweet face, too. But where didst find him, Gaston?

CAREW. [*Rising.*] That were too long a tale. —'T is time for the prologue's signal.

HEYWOOD. [*To* NICK, *who is finishing his lunch.*] We shall seem rough fellows to such as thee, my lad.

[CAREW *has opened the door, and as he gives the signal to the Prologue, there is a crash of music.*]

A VOICE. Good citizens of Coventry and high-born gentles all: know ye now that we, the players of the company of his Grace, Charles, Lord Howard, High Admiral of England, Ireland, Wales, Calais, and Boulogne, the marches of Normandy, Gascony, and Acquitaine, Captain-General of the

Navy and the Seas of Her Gracious Majesty the Queen — [*cheers from the inn-yard, and prolonged shouting, "God save good Queen Bess!"*] — will, with your kind permission, play forthwith the laughable comedy of "The Three Gray Gowns," by Master Thomas Heywood, in which will be spoken many good things, old and new, and a brand-new song will be sung. Now, harken all; — the play begins.

[*A crash of music, as* CAREW *shuts the door again. He has been exchanging words with* HENSLOWE *during the preceding, while keeping an eye on the stage without.*]

CAREW. Nay, I say one fourth of the whole receipts, over and above my old share.

HENSLOWE. Zounds, man, do ye think we have a spigot in El Dorado? This trip has lost us a bagful of shillings already. There 's naught we play will please; —'t is "Shakespeare, Shakespeare!" everywhere. I wish we had him back!

CAREW. But, man, ye 've heard Will say himself, "There 's a tide leads on to fortune if ye but take it at the flood." Come, one fourth over my old share, and I will fill your purse so full of gold that it will gape like a stuffed toad. His is the sweetest voice that ever sugared ears.

HENSLOWE. [*Looking at* NICK, *who is furtively studying his lines, since* HEYWOOD *left him to go upon the stage.*] But, man, man, one fourth!

CAREW. Better one fourth than lose it all.— But, pshaw, Nat Gyles will take him on to lead the choir boys of St. Paul's. [*He strides over to* NICK.] Well, Nicholas, hast all in mind?

NICK. I think so, sir.— It goes, "Good my lord, I bring a letter from the Duke —"

CAREW. [*Laughing.*] Nay, nay; not so. Now mark: "Good my lord, I bring a letter from the Duke"— as if thou hadst indeed a letter, see, as I told thee, and not an empty fist. And when thou dost hand it to him, do it thus — and not as if thou wert about to stab him in the paunch with a cheese knife!

NICK. "Good my lord, I bring a letter from the Duke —"

CAREW. Excellent, i' faith! [*Clapping him on the shoulder.*] 'T is nearly time for thee. [*He strides to the door again, gnawing his mustache. He comes hurrying back.*] — Ready now, lad. [*They pass over to the door, and* CAREW *listens a moment.*] Go straight down

front now as I told thee — mind thy cues — speak boldly — sing as thou didst sing for me,— and if thou wouldst not break thy mother's heart and mine, do not fail me now! [*He opens the door.*]

A VOICE. "How now, who comes?"

CAREW. [*Softly.*] Now. Go!

[*Exit* NICK. *At the same time, two other players slip over to the windows and push back the tapestries farther, to gaze out themselves, thus revealing to the audience the larger part of the play-stage, which should now be very brilliantly lighted, while the lights of the fore-stage are turned down a bit. There is a painted sign visible at the rear, reading, in olden lettering,* "*This is a room in Master Jonah Jackdawe's House.*" NICK *comes into view, hesitatingly.*]

A PLAYER. [*Upon the rude stage.*] "I 'll match him for the ale!"

NICK. Good my lord, I bring a letter — a letter — a letter from the Duke —

A VOICE. [*Rudely mocking as* NICK *pauses in confusion.*] Whoy, bullies, there be hayseed in his hair. I' fecks they 've plucked him green!

[*Boisterous laughter.* CAREW *claps his hand upon his poniard and scowls through the doorway. One of the players behind* NICK *whispers in his ear to prompt him.* NICK *is more confused.*]

NICK. I bring — a good letter from my lord the Duke — [*The crowd jeers as he stops again.*]

CAREW. [*Calling softly, but fiercely.*] Sing up, thou little fool!

NICK. [*As music of a viol and gittern breaks in upon the growing disturbance of the crowd; straightening up and beginning to sing:*]

Pack, clouds, away, and welcome day;
With night we banish sorrow;
Sweet air, blow soft; mount, larks, aloft,
To give my Love good-morrow!
Wings from the wind to please her mind,
Notes from the lark I 'll borrow;
Bird, prune thy wing, nightingale sing,
To give my Love good-morrow;
To give my Love good-morrow
Notes from the lark I 'll borrow.

[*A warbling bird-like trill here, similar to that in* ACT I, *with appropriate music. Silence.*

Then a great shout of applause. HEYWOOD, *on the stage, jumps to his feet.* NICK, *frightened, runs back, through the stage-door, into* CAREW'S *arms.*]

CAREW. Quick, quick! Go back. Dost thou not hear them call?

[NICK, *thrust out upon the play-stage again, stands bewildered.* HEYWOOD *comes up and slips a coin into his hand. Then* CAREW *leads him down the stage, bowing. Shouting and applause.*]

A VOICE. [*As before.*] Whoy, bullies! did a not say 't was catched out in the fields? It be a skylark sure enough.

VOICES. Sing it again! The Skylark — the Skylark!

NICK. [*To* CAREW.] Why, Master Carew, do they mean me?

CAREW. Aye, Nick; 't is thou.

[*Music as before, and song again:*]

Wake from thy nest, Robin-red-breast,
Sing, birds, in every furrow;
And from each hill, let music shrill
Give my fair love good-morrow!

Blackbird and thrush in every bush,
Stare, linnet, and cock-sparrow!
You pretty elves, amongst yourselves
Sing my fair Love good-morrow;
To give my Love good-morrow
Sing, birds, in every furrow.

[*Applause,* NICK *and* CAREW *come back into the tavern room, while the play goes on. The door is now closed, and the curtains partly drawn.*]

CAREW. [*With his arm around* NICK's *shoulders.*] Now, lad, we 'll have the finest supper in the town.— Landlord, what, ho!

PLAYERS. [*Three or four of them, already in the tavern room and waiting for further cues, come crowding around* NICK, *slapping each other on the back and clapping him gently on the shoulders.*] Good boy!— Thou 'rt a rare and golden Skylark!— 'T is true.

LANDLORD. [*Bobbing in obsequiously.*] Didst call, sir?

CAREW. [*Haughtily.*] Here, sirrah, fetch the boy some fine repast, I care not what, so it be wholesome food — a green Banbury cheese, some sinnel bread and oat-cakes; a pudding, hark 'e,

sweet and full of plums, with honey, and a pasty — a meat pasty, marry, a pasty made of fat and toothsome eels; and, moreover, fellow, ale to wash it down — none of thy penny ale, but snapping good brew — dost take me? — with beef and mustard, tripe, herring, and a fat roast capon, stuffed with spiced carrots and broiled to a turn!

LANDLORD. [*Gaping.*] But, Master —

CAREW. How now! Dost think I cannot pay the score?

LANDLORD. Nay, nay; but, sir, where — where will he put it all without bursting into bits?

CAREW. [*Sharply.*] Be off with thee. We 'll manage it. [*Laughingly, to* NICK.] Nay, Nick; the more we leave from supper, the more we 'll have for breakfast. And thou 'lt need a good breakfast to ride on all day long.

NICK. Ride? Why, sir, I was minded to walk back to Stratford, and keep my gold rose-noble whole. [*Looking at the coin which* HEYWOOD *had given him.*]

CAREW. [*Scornfully.*] Walk? Thou, with thy golden throat? Nay, Nicholas [*chuckling, as* LANDLORD *brings in jug and mugs and fills one for* CAREW, *who drinks*], thou 'lt ride to-morrow

like a king, and have all Stratford wait for thee. [*Chuckles again.*]

NICK. [*Bowing.*] Why, Master Carew, thou art kind. I thank ye, sir.

CAREW. Art welcome.— What sayest?— I'll ride a ten-mile race with thee to-morrow as we go?

NICK. Why, are ye going back to Stratford to play, after all?

CAREW. Nay, not for a bushel of good gold Harry shovel-boards. But we shall ride a piece with thee, Nicholas; we shall ride a piece with thee.

NICK. And ye will tell me when to turn into the Stratford road?

CAREW. Aye, that will I. I know the road thou art to ride much better than thou dost thyself. [*Chuckles, as part of the feast is brought in and set before* NICK. HEYWOOD, *with another player, enters from the stage-door, the former approaching* NICK *quietly.*] — Now, thou songster of the silver tongue, break thy fast.

HEYWOOD. [*Standing with his feet apart and still staring at* NICK, *with pity in his voice.*] And

I have writ two hundred plays, yet never saw thy like. Lad, lad, thou 'rt a jewel in a wild swine's snout.

CAREW. Come, Heywood; we are all in the same sty.

HEYWOOD. [*Firmly.*] Speak for thyself, Gat Carew. I 'll have no hand in this. [CAREW *scowls.* HEYWOOD, *sitting down beside* NICK, *puts his arm around the boy's shoulders.*] — So we are to have thee with us awhile.

NICK. Just for to-night, sir. I am going home to-morrow, sir.

CAREW. But, Nick, let me ask one favor of thee first. To-morrow night we play in old St. Albans' town, and I have promised Tom Heywood here that thou shouldst sing his song again for us. 'T will break our hearts if thou wilt not. [NICK *shakes his head.* CAREW, *coaxingly.*] Come, Nick, thou 'lt sing it once again, and set old Albans' town afire?

NICK. Nay, sir; I could na stay from home so long.

CAREW. Why, Nick, we 're fain to hear thy clear, sweet voice once more. Sing us one little song again, as thou alone in all the world canst

sing, and on my word, and on the remnant of mine honor, I 'll see thee safe to Stratford town the next bright morning after.

Nick. [*Hesitatingly.*] But can ye send my mother word that I be safe?

Carew. Aye, marry, that we can, by the next carrier.

[Heywood *has not heard the last two remarks, as a player had come up to him to ask a question about some of the stage property. Now he turns back in time to hear the next speech.*]

Nick. And thou wilt let me go the morrow after next?

Carew. Aye, verily.

Heywood. Carew, how can ye have the heart?

Carew. [*Curtly.*] Come, Heywood, I have heard enough from thee.

Heywood. [*Quietly, lifting his brows.*] Very well; but [*turning to* Nick], lad, Tom Heywood 's a friend will never speak thee false.

Carew. [*Clapping his hand upon his poniard.*] Sir!

HEYWOOD. [*Looking at him steadily.*] Wilt quarrel with me, Carew — with me who took thy new-born child from her dying mother's arms when thou wert fast in Newgate jail?

CAREW. [*As if suddenly stricken, shutting his eyes, and pushing out his hand in the air as if to stop* HEYWOOD, *groaning.*] Ah!

HEYWOOD. [*With deep feeling.*] Thou canst not quarrel with me. 'T would be a sorry story for my soul or thine to tell to hers.

CAREW. Don't, Tom, don't.

HEYWOOD. Then how can ye have the heart?

CAREW. [*Lifting up his head, with lips trembling.*] 'T is not the heart, Tom [*bitterly*]; it is the head which doeth this. But, Tom, thou hast just heard him sing: 't is worth a thousand pounds. How can I leave him go?

HEYWOOD. Oh, fie, for shame upon the man I took thee for!

NICK. [*Wretchedly.*] But, sir, ye have just promised I should go.

CAREW. [*Pleadingly.*] Why, Nick, I told thee if thou wouldst sing one little song, I 'd send thee back the next bright morning after. But,

lad, thou sure canst see if thou shouldst leave us now so soon, there 'd never again come a single bright good morrow.

NICK. [*Despairingly.*] Oh, Master Carew, ye said but now that ye would leave me go, and then ye say ye will na. There is a falsehood — a wicked black falsehood — somewhere betwixt you and me, sir; and ye know I have na lied to you. [*Sobs.*]

HEYWOOD. Carew, thou surely canst not mean to keep him for good and all? Wouldst spoil his sweet young soul among wild blades like us?

CAREW. But, look it straightly in the face, Tom: I 'm no such player as I was — and here ruin stares us in the eye. We storm town after town for scant twelve shillings clear. There 's naught will serve: we 've tried old Marlowe, Robin Greene, and all; but now from pit to stall the people clamor out for Shakespeare. I tell thee, Tom, there 's magic in the fellow. Why, we must often play to empty stools, while their new Blackfriars' playhouse doth take ten pounds the night. And, Tom, there 's Cicely,— not one penny laid by for her against a rainy day; and some time I 'll be gone, Tom; it is not morning all day long.— Nay, I cannot leave him go.

NICK. [*Wretchedly, holding fast to* HEYWOOD'S *arm.*] But, sir, my mother — my mother's heart will surely break if I do na come home.

HEYWOOD. Why, Gaston, hath the boy a mother, too?

CAREW. Now, Heywood, on thy soul, no more! Ye 'll make me out a fiend. I cannot let him go — I will not. And, Tom, there 's that within me will not abide even *thy* pestering. [*He strides over to the stage-door, gnawing his mustache. After a moment, a player comes through the door, letting in the sound of laughter and cheers.* NICK *is sobbing, his head upon the table.* CAREW *soon goes out himself upon the play-stage.*]

HEYWOOD. [*Bending over* NICK, *gently.*] Nay, Nick, my lad, don't cry. *Never 's* a weary while; but the longest lane will turn at last: some day thou 'lt find thy home again all in a twinkling. [*Taking a knife in his hand.*] Come, lad, taste this mutton pie. 'T is excellently spiced, I warrant thee. [NICK *shakes his head.*] The good God made the sheep that 's in this pie, not Gaston Carew. Eat it — come, 't will do thee good. Thy tired and empty stomach hath need of the savory cheer that 's locked herein. [NICK *begins to eat, more heartily after the first*

taste.] There! Why, Nick, 't is England still, and thou an Englishman. Come, give the world as good as it can send. [NICK *raises his head, and, throwing the hair back from his eyes, winks the tears from them bravely.*] Sing thou my songs, dear lad, and I will be thy friend — let this be for an earnest. [*He slips a small seal-ring from his little finger upon* NICK'S *middle finger, then rises and, going to the stage-door, presently, exit.* NICK *sniffs once or twice, but after looking at the ring, goes on eating. Reënter* CAREW.]

CAREW. [*Half jestingly.*] Come, cheer up, lad, that I may know thou lov'st me.

NICK. [*Indignantly.*] But I do na love thee.

CAREW. Tut, tut, lad. Be fair. I 'll feed thee full and dress thee well and treat thee true — all for that song of thine. Thou 'lt be the pet of every high-born dame in London.

NICK. I 'd rather be with mother, and hear the birds along the Avon sing.

CAREW. Best learn to like us, but — I must away to do my turn again. Gregory Goole will keep thee company, lad, till we have put a finish to the play. [*Moves toward the door, and says to* GOOLE:] Do not let the boy from thy sight.

Watch him as thou wouldst thy precious life, or — tsst! [*Makes a threatening gesture, and exit, with two or three other players, leaving* NICK *and* GOOLE *alone.*]

GOOLE. [*Sitting at a table facing* NICK, *and playing with dice.*] Threes. Pah! — Four and two.— 'S life! Curse the dice! — Fives! [*He gradually becomes engrossed in the game. The clang of the smithy's anvil is heard again.*] A plague on the bedlam dice! I think they be bewitched.— Can I throw nothing but threes and fours?

NICK. [*Aside.*] If I could only slip away and find my cousin's house! [*Edges towards the door.*]

GOOLE. A murrain on the luck! — Ah, 't is dry work.— What! [*Springing up suddenly.*] Thou little imp! [*Drawing his knife.*] Don't try this on again! [*Catches* NICK *by the throat.*]

NICK. [*Gasping.*] Oh, Master Goole, thou 'rt choking me!

GOOLE. [*Savagely.*] If thou triest this sort o' caper on again, thy life 's not worth a rotten peascod. [NICK *is speechless with terror, and cowers down upon a stool.* GOOLE *swaggers to a table and*

lays his dagger down upon it. Then, picking up an ale-can, he takes a little drink. Smacking his lips, he looks at NICK, *makes a horrible face as if to threaten him, then turns the ale-can up and drinks again, long and deeply, with his face half buried in the pot.* NICK *slips out of the door into the street.*] What, ho! the devil! [*To* LANDLORD, *who enters.*] Didst see him, there?

LANDLORD. Nay, sir; see who?

GOOLE. God's footstool! I 'll catch it now! [*Runs to the door and exit, shouting:*] Stop him there! A shilling to the man 'll catch the rogue. Hath snatched a fortune from my hands.

VOICES. [*Outside, mingled with noise and shouts.*] Catch the knave! — Head him off there! — Stop, thief!

[*A brawny blacksmith appears through the doorway, with a red-hot horseshoe held in his forge-pincers.*]

SMITH. [*Calling to* LANDLORD.] What hath the varlet stolen, Ned?

LANDLORD. I know not; not I. He 's with the players.

SMITH. Little good he 'll come to, then. — Ah, they have him. Adrad, no! He 's off again.

[*Increasing noise, tumult, and sound of men running.*] Whoy, 't is well run. See him dodge! Eigh! he 's slipped 'em down an alley. [NICK *appears in the street, running, followed by a crowd of citizens,* GOOLE *entering last.* NICK *runs to the* SMITH, *who has just entered the tavern room, and dodges behind him, clinging to his leather apron.*] — Hoo, man, what a dickens! [*Snorting in surprise, and dropping the hissing shoe.*]

NICK. [*Panting.*] Do na leave them take me! — They ha' stolen me — from Stratford town — and will na leave me go!

A CITIZEN. [*Rushing up to* NICK, *and trying to take him by the collar.*] Thou young rascal, I have thee now!

SMITH. So-oftly, so-oftly. [*He tweaks up the glowing shoe in his pincers and sweeps a sputtering half-circle in front of the cowering* NICK.] What hath youngster here did now?

CITIZEN. He hath stolen a fortune from his master — and the shilling for him 's mine.

SMITH. Hath stealed a fortune? Whoy [*scratching his head in a puzzled way and turning upon* NICK, *who is still dodging around him*], lad, where hast putten it?

NICK. I ha' stolen naught. They ha' stolen me.

CAREW. [*Bursting in through the stage-door, with the rest of the players and some of the crowd behind him.*] How, now! What meaneth this disturbance of the play? [*Seeing* GOOLE.] What 's this to-do, I say?

GOOLE. Thy boy hath tried to 'scape.

CAREW. Hast not caught him? [*Seeing* NICK.] Fetch him forth.

GOOLE. [*Stammering, as the* SMITH *stolidly mows the air in front of himself and* NICK *again with the sputtering shoe.*] But he will na be fetched. [*Crowd shouts.*]

CAREW. [*Fiercely, elbowing his way towards* NICK.] Nicholas Attwood, come hither.

NICK. [*To* SMITH.] He is not my master: I be not bound out apprentice — he is stealing me away from my own home, and it will break my mother's heart.

SMITH. [*Drawling, in his deep voice.*] Nobody breaks nobody's hearts when old John Smith 's around; we be honest-dealing folk in Coventry — an' makes as good horseshoes as be forged

in all England. [*He placidly goes on mowing the air with the glimmering shoe.*]

CAREW. [*Haughtily, with hand on poniard.*] Here, fellow, stand aside and let me pass. [*Crowd falls back.*]

SMITH. [*Puffing out his sooty cheeks.*] Droive slow through the crowd, muster. I be a free-born Englishman, and I 'll stand aside for no ruffling it here. Come, now, speak thee fair what thou wilt o' the lad, or thou 'lt get a dab o' the red-hot shoe. [*Gripping the tongs with an extra twirl.*] What wilt thou o' the lad?

CAREW. [*Changing his tone to a burlesque of the* SMITH'S.] What will I o' the lad? [*Winks at the crowd.*] What will I o' the lad?

CROWD. [*Laughing.*] Ha! ha! ha!

CAREW. Why, bless thy gentle heart, good man, I want to turn his farthings into round, red, golden crowns — if thou and thine infernally hot shoe do not make zanies of us all. Why, Master Smith, 't is to London town I 'll take him, to fill his hands with more shillings than there be horse-shoe nails in thy whole shop. But now the child hath only gone a trifle sick for home, and whimpers for his minnie.

Smith. But the lad saith thou hast stealed him away from 's ho-ome; and we 'll ha' no stealing o' lads in Coventry town.

Crowd. Nay, that we won't, John Smith. Fair play, fair play! [*Threatening gestures and murmurings.*]

Carew. [*Turning so sharply on them, with hand on poniard, that the crowd falls back.*] What! fair play? Why, sirs, what if I took any one of ye out of your poverty and common clothes down into London, horseback like a king, and had ye sing before the Queen, and play for earls, and talk with the highest dames in all the land; and fed ye well, and spoke ye fair, and lodged ye soft, and clad ye fine, and wrought the whole town on to cheer ye and to fill your purses full of gold? [*Turning to* Smith.] What, sir, what if I promised thee to turn thy every word to a silver sixpence and thy smutty grins to golden angels — what wouldst thou? — Knock me in the head with thy dirty tongs, and bawl "foul play"?

Smith. [*Stupidly, scratching his head.*] Nay, that I 'd not.— I 'd say, "Go it, bully, and a plague on him that says thee nay!"

Carew. And yet, when I would fill this silly fellow's jerkin full of good gold Harry shovel-

"Nobody breaks nobody's hearts in old Jo-ohn Smithses sho-op," drawled the Smith, in his deep voice; "nor steals nobody, nother."

boards for the simple drawing of his breath, ye bawl "Foul play!"

SMITH. [*Laughing hoarsely, and striking* NICK *jovially between the shoulders.*] What, here! come out, lad, and go along o' the muster here —'t is for thy good,— and ho-ome wull keep, I trow.

NICK. [*Hanging back, and clinging to the* SMITH'S *arm despairingly.*] I will na — oh, I will na.

CAREW. Tut, tut! Nicholas. Come; I mean thee well, I 'll speak thee fair, and treat thee true. [*Smiling frankly and winningly.*] I 'll swear it on mine honor as an Englishman. What, how, bullies? Upon mine honor as an Englishman! — how is 't? Here we be, all Englishmen together. [*Clapping his hand to the first* CITIZEN'S *shoulder, who thereupon straightens up proudly.*] What! — ye are all for fair play? — and so am I, and good master Smith here, too! Why, sirs, we stand all together then, and what more can a man ask than good, downright English fair play? [*Waving his hand.*] Hurrah for good old English fair play!

CROWD. Hurrah, hurrah! Fair play, says we — English fair play! Hurrah! [*Waving of hands and tossing up of caps.*]

CAREW. Hurrah, my bullies! That 's the cry. Why, we 're the very best of friends! Come now, all of you, and douse a can of brown March brew at my expense. Landlord, serve every one of my dear fellows here with good brown British ale. [LANDLORD *bustles about, filling mugs for the crowd.*] — We 'll drink to the Queen, to good fair play, and to all the fine fellows in Coventry town.

CROWD. [*Roaring, crowding about the tables and* SMITH, *raising mugs, etc.*] Hurrah, hurrah! Fair play! fair play!

GOOLE. [*Seizing* NICK *by the hand and leading him away, unnoticed by the crowd.*] Thou little, foul-chanced imp!

CAREW. [*Joining them, grimly.*] Now, Nicholas Attwood, hark 'e well to what I have to say. I am willed to take thee to London town — dost mark me? — and, by the whistle of the Lord High Admiral, to London town thou shalt go, warm or cold. [*Claps hand on poniard, and stares at* NICK *sternly, opening and shutting his eyelids.* NICK *is speechless with terror.*]

CROWD. [*Laughing, drinking, and shouting together.*] Ha! ha! ha! — Whooee! — Hurray!

CAREW. [*Still unnoticed, exit with* NICK, *followed by* GOOLE. *At the door, he pauses to look back contemptuously, and snaps his fingers at the crowd in scorn.*] Bubble-minded fools!

[CURTAIN]

[End of ACT II]

ACT III

[*Room in* GASTON CAREW'S *house, London. Four days later. Late afternoon.*

Large open fireplace, with heavy wooden carved work. Wainscoted, paneled walls, with two portières, concealing doorways, at the back. A heavy oak door opens to the left, and a passage-way to the right; and high windows give a glimpse of chimney-pots and roofs beyond.

An old, black, brass-bound Spanish sea-chest by one wall. An ancient table, two heavy chairs, an arm-chair, and a stool are near the fireplace. A burnished copper brazier burns at the rear, near which is a low couch, half-hidden by a movable screen.

Enter CAREW *with* NICK.]

CAREW. Now, Sir Jackanapes, sit down awhile and cool thy silly pate. When thou hast found thy common sense, perchance thou 'lt find thy freedom, not before. [*Exit, bolting the door with a bang.*]

NICK. [*Running to the door.*] Oh, Master Carew, let me out — please let me go home! [*Sound of retreating footsteps.* NICK *pounds on the door.*] Let me out! Let me out, I say!

[*He runs to the windows and peers out, finally standing with fists clenched, but looking about uncertainly. Enter, cautiously, a* BUTLER, *with a bowl of bread and milk, just as* NICK *carries the stool to a window, climbs up, and tries to undo the fastening.*]

BUTLER. [*Hurriedly setting down the bowl of milk and the quarter loaf of bread, and waddling to the window.*] Here, here, odzookens, lad! Ztop un, ztop un; do now. If thou couldst pry it loose, and out, the drop would break thy neck. Come sit ye here, and eat a bit.

NICK. [*Coming down.*] I will na eat a bite here in this house. I 'd sooner starve.

BUTLER. Now, now! Talk not so bitterly. My muster meaneth well by 'e.— Rest thee a bit yon.

NICK. I 'll neither eat nor sleep till I get word to Master Shakespeare to come and set me free.

BUTLER. Whoy, dost know Muster Wull Zhacksper?

NICK. He 's my mother's cousin.

BUTLER. Zo-o! Muster Zhacksper be-eth a famous man. Liveth in a fine large house on this zame street, but vurther down.

NICK. Oh, is it true? Oh, wilt thou tell him where I be, and how I am not free? — Here, I have a gold rose-noble that Master Heywood gave me.

BUTLER. Noa, I canna. Muster Wull beant there.

NICK. Where is he then?

BUTLER. Gone awa-ay.

NICK. Away! Whither?

BUTLER. A 's gone to court at Greenwich where the Queen doth stay — a went yesterday.

NICK. Yesterday! Just yesterday! [*Sits down, despairingly; but as* BUTLER *looks at him curiously, braces up a little.*] Is — is Master Richard Burbage of Stratford town at the Blackfriars' Theater now?

BUTLER. Noa; Muster Bubbage beant there, nuther. A wun't play-act no more avore next Martlemas.

A VOICE. [*Calling harshly, outside.*] Jem! Jem Barstow!

BUTLER. [*Replying.*] Aye, aye, Gregory.

GOOLE. [*Still outside; more sharply.*] Leave the varlet and come down. There 's work to do.

BUTLER. Coming. [*Exit hurriedly.*]

[NICK, *after a moment of uncertainty, in which he tries hard to keep from breaking down, throws himself upon the couch in utter despair. Through the windows, out over the roofs of the nearer London, lights appear one by one in the houses.*

A soft knock is heard at the door. NICK *does not hear it. The bolt is drawn softly, and* CICELY CAREW, *with a lighted candle, stands in the doorway. She is a pretty girl, about* NICK'S *own age, some twelve years.*]

CICELY. [*Softly.*] Boy! [NICK *turns and stares as if she were a princess in a dream. Slowly he gets up and stands amazedly. Then* CICELY, *with a quaint little air of reproof, but gently:*] Where are thy manners? [NICK *quickly bows, stares wonderingly, and bows again, more slowly.* CICELY, *with naïve surprise.*] Why, thou art a pretty boy. But why wilt be so bad and break my father's heart?

NICK. Break thy father's heart? [*Stammering.*] Why, why, pr'ythee, who is thy father, Mistress Princess?

CICELY. [*Simply.*] Nay, I am no princess. I am Cicely Carew.

NICK. [*Clenching his fists.*] Cicely Carew? Art thou the daughter of that wicked man?

CICELY. My father is not wicked. [*Passionately, drawing back to the threshold, with her hand trembling on the latch.*] I will not speak with thee at all.

NICK. I do na care! If Master Gaston Carew is thy father, he is the wickedest man in the world.

CICELY. Fie, for shame! [*Stamping her foot.*] How darest thou say such a thing?

NICK. [*Indignantly.*] He hath stolen me from home.

CICELY. [*Looking at him in troubled surprise, she comes into the room, sets down her candle, and touches him on the arm.*] There, don't cry.— Thou must be ill. My father would not steal a pin. [*Soothingly, stroking his forehead gently.*] He will send thee to thy home and to thy mother, I know; for he is very kind and good.— Don't cry any more.

NICK. [*Stoutly.*] I 'm not crying.

CICELY. Then it is the roof leaks. [*Pretending not to see his tear-blinded eyes, she looks up, and then around the room, seeing the bread and the bowl finally.*] Come, thou art hungry, and it hath made thee cross. [*She leads him by the hand to a chair by the table, and lights another candle.*]

NICK. [*Peering up at the windows.*] Is London town all smoke-pipes?

CICELY. Nay, there be people down under the chimney-pots. And in the streets, hundreds and hundreds more. It is the biggest city in the world.

NICK. I canna breathe here. It is na like our Stratford.

CICELY. And is thy Stratford a pretty town?

NICK. Aye. [*He looks into the fire dreamily.*] The air is ever sweet, and the wind makes all the Avon river ripple in the sun, like — like twinkling stars, so that it dazzles one to look. And, oh, there be red and white wild roses in the hedges, and in the air a smell of clover and of new-mown hay. The mowers will be working in the clover even now, in the bright moonlight. Canst not almost see the sweep of the shining scythes

and hear the chink-a-chank, chink-a-chank of the whetstone on the long, curving blades? Chink-a-chank, chink-a-chank, it goes, until I fall asleep. And then I wake to hear a throstle piping to the daisies on the hill, or a lark song far up in the blue air. And then I hear the voice of some one calling me — my mother —

CICELY. [*Leaning forward.*] Oh, boy; *dear* boy! — Thou shalt have some of the new pasty to eat and a cake that 's in the buttery. [*She pulls a tall, curiously made stool to the other side of the table, and perches herself upon it, calling imperiously.*] Greg! Greg! What, how! Gregory Goole, I say!

GOOLE. [*Without, hoarsely, from the door.*] Yes, ma'm'selle. [*Enters, sees* NICK *near the half-open door. Sourly.*] Tut, tut! thy father will not like this. [*Closes the door.*]

CICELY. [*Scornfully.*] Dost think I do not know my father's likes and dislikes better than thou? Wouldst starve him here? [*Severely.*] Go tell Jem to fetch the pasty and the little cake from the buttery, with a glass of cordial, or I will tell my father what thou wottest of.

GOOLE. [*Fawning, but with poor grace.*] Very good, ma'm'selle. [*Scowling blackly at*

NICK, *and snarling as he turns away.*] But, knave, if thou dost venture any scurvy pranks while I be gone, I 'll break thy pate. [*Exit.*]

CICELY. 'T is a saucy rogue, but he doth butter his tongue with smooth words when he hath speech with me: I caught him once at the Spanish wine behind my father's back.— I am the lady of the house, for *my* mother is dead; and oh, boy, when one's mother is gone, there is a hurting-place that naught doth ever heal.— She was a Frenchwoman, the loveliest that ever lived, although I never saw her. [*She clasps her hands, and moves her lips.* NICK, *seeing that she is praying, bends his head also.*] Thou art a good boy [*softly*]; my father will like that. [*Going on quietly.*] But I am a right English girl, for all that Gregory doth call me "ma'm'selle"; and when they shout "God save the Queen!" at the play, why, I do, too. [*Clapping her hands, with sparkling eyes.*] Hast ever seen the Queen?

NICK. Nay; hast thou?

CICELY. Nay, but my father hath often promised me that I should go to court when I am a little older.— And, oh, he hath bought thee a fine new suit, for he saith perhaps thou 'lt go to see the Queen thyself.

GOOLE. [*Appearing at the door.*] Ma'm'selle, thy father cometh; 't were best to wait before I serve the pasty. [*Exit.*]

CICELY. Canst wait a moment longer, boy?

NICK. Aye, truly.— But dost think thy father will truly leave me go?

CICELY. Of course he will. I cannot see why thou dost hate him so.

NICK. Why, truly [*hesitatingly*], if he would but leave me go, I 'd not: perhaps I 'd love him very much indeed.

CAREW. [*Entering, and holding out his hands genially.*] Good, Nick! 't is spoken like a gentleman. Nay, I will kiss thee — for I love thee, Nick, upon my word, and on the remnant of mine honor! [*Taking* NICK's *half-unwilling hands in his own, he stoops and kisses him upon the forehead.*]

CICELY. [*Gravely.*] Father, hast thou forgotten me?

CAREW. [*With a wonderfully affectionate laugh, turning quickly and kissing her most tenderly, while she twines her arms about his neck, and lies back with her head upon his shoulder.*] Nay, sweetheart, nay.

CICELY. [*Patting his cheek.*] Daddy, some one hath told him naughty things of thee. Come, say they are not so.

CAREW. [*Uneasily, coughing, and looking up among the roof-beams.*] Why, of course they 're not.

CICELY. There, boy! I told thee.— Why, they said thou 'dst stolen him away from home! [*Enter* BUTLER.]

CAREW. Ho, Jem,— we 'll have the supper here together now. Bring in the pasty and some cakes and honey, and a cordial, also. [*Exit* BUTLER.] Thou 'lt have a draught of cordial, Nick, to pledge me in, I know [*lights more candles as he speaks*], for thou art on the threshold of a golden-lined success. [*Enter* BUTLER *with food.*]— Hullo, what a hole thou hast made in the pasty!

CICELY. [*Soberly.*] Ay, Daddy, and what a hole it would make in his mother's heart if he had been stolen away!

CAREW. [*Hurriedly, reaching for the tall flagon, with a trembling hand.*] Wilt take a little, lad? See, Nick, how the light shines through? [*Tilting up the flagon.*]

CICELY. Thou 'lt send him home again, Daddy?

CAREW. [*His hand spilling some wine as he pours it out, nervously, and setting the glass flagon down hard upon the table.*] Yes, yes, to be sure — we 'll send him anywhere thou dost say, Goldenheart.

NICK. [*Falteringly.*] And will ye truly leave me go, sir?

CAREW. Why, yes, yes. But, Nick, thou couldst not walk it, lad, in six whole days; there will be carriers anon. Come, stay awhile with Cicely and me — we will make thee a right welcome guest.

CICELY. [*Clapping her hands.*] Oh, do stay; I am so lonely here, and the rats run in the wall.

CAREW. And thou wilt sing for London town before thou goest. The Queen should hear thee sing.

CICELY. [*Leaning on the arm of her chair, devouring* NICK *with her great, dark eyes.*] Dost truly, truly sing?

CAREW. [*As* NICK *laughs and appears embarrassed.*] What? Why, Goldenheart, he singeth like a skylark.

CICELY. Thou 'lt sing for me — when thou hast finished? — my mother used to sing.

[CAREW *turns pale, and puts his hand quickly up to his face.* CICELY *darts to his side with a frightened cry, and catches his hand away.*]

CAREW. [*Trying to smile.*] Tush, tush, little one; 't was something stung me. [*Huskily, and with great weariness and sadness.*] Stay, Nicholas, I beg of thee. And sing for us here — even for me whom thou hatest! We need thee sadly, Cicely and I. We be both too much alone. [*After a pause, softly.*] Nick, I wonder if thou couldst play as well as sing?

NICK. What, sir, do ye mean? A game?

CAREW. Nay, lad; a gittern.

NICK. [*In some surprise.*] Why, sir, I do na know the knack. I ha' heard one played but once; yet 't was passing sweet.

CAREW. Aye, lad, 't is passing sweet.— I heard one first in France, a many years ago. Ai, but that is a land of dreams, my lad and lass, a land of dreams, I say. 'T is there the lilies grow even in the ditches, and the tall trees stand by the roadsides, and the wine has sunshine 'prisoned in it that sets the pulses dancing to a music such as we can never even dream of here. And the women are all radiant as queens, with hair

like night, and eyes like the summer stars.— Thou wilt be like them, sweetheart; thou wilt be like the fairest of them all. [*He stops suddenly and stares out of the window into the night.*]

CICELY. Is thy mother like that, Nick?

NICK. Nay; I would na call her so; her hair is partly gray, but her eyes do often shine.

CICELY. And is thy mother a good woman, Nick?

CAREW. Aye, Sweetheart [*putting out a hand to each*]; none but a good mother could have so good a son.

CICELY. Then thou wilt send him home, Daddy?

CAREW. Aye, my lass. All in good time. In good time, I promise thee.— But, nay, Goldenheart, no more questions now.— Come, why should we be sad? I tell thee, Nick, thou shalt be a fairy prince for us and make us all forget the past. Thou 'lt look the part, forsooth, when thou art dressed in thy new skylark feathers — will he not, Cicely Goldenheart? What, ho, Gregory! fetch the bundle.— Gregory! what, ho! [*Enter* GOOLE.] The new suit, sirrah. [*Exit* GOOLE.] Nick, thou art to be one of Paul's boys.

Cicely darted to his side with a frightened cry.

NICK. Paul who?

CAREW. [*Laughing.*] "Paul who?"— [GOOLE *brings in a bundle, and exit.* CAREW *opens it, displaying the new suit.*] Paul! Why, Saint Paul, Nick —'t is Paul's Cathedral boys, I mean. — Marry, what dost say to this?

NICK. [*Slowly.*] I 'd like another barley cake.

CAREW. [*Dropping the garments, as if in surprise.*] You 'd *what?*

NICK. I 'd like another barley-cake. [*Quietly, helping himself to the honey.*]

CAREW. Upon my word, and on the remnant of mine honor! Why, thou 'dst say "Pooh!" to a cannon-ball! My faith, boy, thou 'rt to sing with the children of Paul's; to play with the cathedral company; to be a bright particular star in the sweetest galaxy that ever shone in English sky! Dost take me yet?

NICK. [*Busily sopping the honey with his cake.*] Aye.

CAREW. [*Playing with his glass uneasily, and tapping his heel upon the floor.*] 'T is the flood-tide of thy fortune, boy! [NICK *does not an-*

swer.] Thou 'rt foolishly stubborn-hearted. But, marry come up: thou art to sing here to-night before the old precentor of St. Paul's, Master Nathaniel Gyles, that he may take thy range and worth. Now, truly, thou wilt do thy very best? [*Enter the* BUTLER *with some water in a ewer which he pours into a basin for* NICK *to wash his hands.* NICK *wipes his hands in silence.*] Come [*sharply*], thou 'lt sing thy very best?

NICK. [*Doggedly.*] There 's nothing else to do.

CICELY. Daddy!

CAREW. Nay, child.— He will be here shortly.— Hark! He is even now at the door.— Go, Nick, and don thy new costume. Gregory [*enter* GOOLE], do you and Jem here help the lad to don his suit in a trice. [*Exeunt* NICK *with* GOOLE *and bundle, followed by the* BUTLER. *Enter* GYLES, *an old man, with thin legs, wrinkled, yellow face, thin, sandy hair, and keen eyes; with a broad gold chain about his neck. He is pompously pedantic.* Good even, Master Gyles. Thou 'rt good to come.

GYLES. [*Puffing.*] Pouf! Thy stairs be steep, Master Carew.— God give ye good even, Mistress Cicely.— Zounds, sir, I 'd climb a stair-

way forty paces long to hear a clear tone sung. Thou saidst thy lad could out-sing all of mine. Sir, ye touch me near home there.

CAREW. I 'll prove my words, Master Nathaniel Gyles, or pay thee forfeit of forty golden pounds.

GYLES. Let 's have no more of boasts. Let 's hear the lad.

CAREW. He 'll be here anon, as soon as his new clothes be donned. And now, Master Gyles, let us finish the matter. Ye clearly understand, if ye take the lad, thine ancient right as master of the school, to seize for St. Paul's choir whatever voices please thee, will not serve with me. Ye have sworn he shall still be mine, to have and to hold, with all his earnings, in spite of thy royal prerogatives.

GYLES. [*Haughtily.*] Thou hadst mine oath this afternoon before I have even seen the boy. Dost think me perjured? Me? Pouf! I know my place: one peg below the Dean, sir. My oath 's my oath.

CAREW. Good! — I will teach him how to act myself. He stays with me, you understand. I 'll dress him, too; for students' robes be shabby stuff. But for the rest —

GYLES. Trust me.

CAREW. Aye, verily. But have a care, Master Gyles — one cannot teach the lark its song: — change not his warbling skylark notes.

GYLES. Sir! I studied in the best schools in the world.

CAREW. Soft! — Enough — here 's the boy. [*Enter* NICK, *dressed in the new suit: There is a fine white shirt of Holland linen, and long hose of grayish blue, with puffed and slashed trunks of velvet so blue as to be almost black; and a sleeveless jerkin of the same color, with roses embroidered in silk, made loose from breast to collar, which is itself of broad white lace, so that the waistcoat of dull silk beneath may show; and then a cloak of damask with a silver clasp; a buff leather belt with a chubby purse hung to it by a chain; tan colored slippers; and a jaunty velvet cap with a short white plume.*]

GYLES. A skylark? A popinjay!

CICELY. [*Dancing toward* NICK, *from her retreat by the window, and clapping her hands as she circles around him.*] Oh, brave, brave, brave! Why, 't is a prince, a king! Oh, Nick, I told thee thou 'd be beautiful to see!

"Oh, Nick, thou art most beautiful to see!" cried Cicely.

CAREW. My soul! [*Steps back and snaps his fingers in delight.*] Why, lad, thou art the bravest bird ever broke shell! — Master Nathaniel Gyles, Nick. [NICK *bows.*]

GYLES. [*Crustily.*] Pouf! Pouf! *Tempus fugit* — that is to say, we have no time to waste. Marry, boy, if thou hast merit, let us now enjoy it.— Come, first of all I bid thee sing this song [*unrolling a parchment for* NICK].

NICK. But, sir, I do na know how to sing from paper.

GYLES. What! canst not read music?

NICK. Nay, sir, I never learned.

GYLES. Pouf! So? Canst run the scale?

NICK. I think so, sir. [*Singing.*] Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do.— Do, si, la, sol,— re — nay, 't is fa — fa —

GYLES. Tut, tut! Thou 'st ruined it.— Come, dost know the new Italian coranto?

NICK. Nay, sir, I never heard of it.

GYLES. Hast learned perchance to dance the galliard?

NICK. Nay, sir; I do not know that either.

GYLES. Pouf! pouf! Canst act at all?

NICK. Why, sir, Master Carew hath taught me lines from Master Heywood's play, "The Three Gray Gowns"— "Good my lord, I bring a letter —"

GYLES. Nay, 't is too stiff. Canst make a court-like bow? [NICK *bows awkwardly.*] — Nay, nay; that way thou trippest over thine own feet. Not so; but *so.* [*Bows.*] Now, look 'e, dost know any dance at all?

NICK. Nay, sir; father would na have it.

GYLES. [*Impatiently, to* CAREW.] Why, sir, what *doth* he know? Ye have misrepresented this boy to me, to the waste of much good time. He cannot dance, nor act, nor read a note; he cannot even sing a scale.

CAREW. [*Haughtily.*] Soft, Master Gyles — Dost mean to say I lied to thee? Marry, sir, I told thee only the boy could sing; and sing he can.

GYLES. Pouf, sir — words! I know my place: "*Primus Magister Scholarum*"— nothing less — 't is so set down. And I tell thee, sir, he can't tell a prick-song from a bottle of hay, or a triolet from a violet; he would not know a canon from a crocodile, or a fugue from a hole in the ground.

CAREW. Oh, fol-de-riddle de fol-de-rol! What has that to do with it? I tell thee still the boy can sing.

GYLES. And I say, sir, that music does not grow like weeds.

CAREW. Nor fa-la-las make up a voice.

GYLES. What! How? Wilt thou teach me? Thou, who knowest not a staccato from a stick of licorice? — Why! I 'd best be going, sir. My cloak there, without!

CAREW. [*Shrugging his shoulders, impatiently.*] Come, Master Gyles, we waste words. Thou knowest me no simple gull. And I tell thee, sir, he has the voice that thou dost need to win the favor of the Queen. Just hear him once sing his own song in his own way — thou 'lt pawn thine ears to hear him twice.

GYLES. Come, boy, sing, and that forthwith — if thou canst sing at all.

CAREW. [*In a low, hard tone to* NICK.] Thou 'lt do thy level best! [*Claps his hand threateningly upon his dagger.* NICK *cringes shrinking from him as in fear.* CICELY *darts to his side.*]

CICELY. Don't mind their harsh words, Nick. But sing for me. Remember what thou toldst me of thy home in Stratford, with the birds all singing by the river, the mowers in the fields, and the clover and wild-roses in the hedgerows.— Nay, Nick, I know thou 'lt sing thy lark-song just for me!

CAREW. [*Seated, with his head in his hands, waiting, now looks up quickly thinking* NICK *is not going to sing.*] By the whistle of the Lord High Admiral! —

NICK. [*Beginning to sing, with a distant look in his eyes:*]

Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus 'gins arise
His steeds to water at those springs
On chalic'd flowers that lies;
And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes;
With everything that pretty is,
My lady sweet, arise,
Arise, arise.

[*The song ends with the bird-trill as before.* CICELY *watches* NICK *with shining eyes.* CAREW'S *face is buried in his hands.* GYLES *starts from his chair, his wrinkled hands*

pressed together against his breast almost as if in prayer. The BUTLER *peeps in at the door.*]

BUTLER. *Do*, now, harken to un!

GYLES. [*Panting.*] That voice! that voice!

CAREW. [*Brokenly.*] I 'll leave thee go, lad, — *ma foi*, I 'll leave thee go! But nay, I dare not leave thee go. [*Drawing his hand hastily over his face.*]

CICELY. Oh, Nick, I love thee! I 'll make a home forever for thee here.

GYLES. *Mirabile!* It is impossible, and I have dreamed. Soft as a flute and silver clear.— Nay, Carew, 't was a soul I heard; the lad's own white young soul. 'T was his soul that set a song on fire in the sky, and dropped it quivering and bright into our shadow world.— My faith, there 's a sour bug flown in mine eye that makes it water so.

CAREW. Thou 'lt take him then?

GYLES. Take him? Marry, I 'll make him first singer of them all! — [*There comes the sound of boys' voices singing, in the street below.*] What 's here? — My lads — and out in the street?

VOICES. [*Singing:*]

Down-a-down, hey, down-a-down,
Hey derry derry down-a-down!

Cold 's the wind, and wet 's the rain;
Saint Hugh, be our good speed!
Ill is the weather that bringeth no gain,
Nor helps good hearts in need.

Down-a-down, hey, down-a-down,
Hey derry derry down-a-down!

[*Still outside, calling.*] Master Gyles! Master Gyles! Where art thou, Master Gyles?

GYLES. [*Goes to window.*] Marry, come up. — They 've traced me hither. What news there? [*At the window.*] What news? Belike the Queen's message hath come. [*Turns toward stair.*]

COLLEY. [*Outside at first, running up the stairs, and entering the room out of breath.*] What, there,— oh, Master Gyles — Master Carew [*bowing*]! — Mistress [*bowing*]!

NICK. [*As through the open window two books come thumping past his ears.*] Whatever in the world!

GYLES. What 's to do?

COLLEY. [*As he hands* GYLES *a stamped and sealed parchment.*] A man-at-arms of the Queen's own yeomen of the guard hath brought this from the Palace, sir. [*To* CAREW, *excitedly.*] Good news — good news, sir! Have ye heard the news? [*Shouting continues below.*] We 're going to court. Hurrah!

CAREW. [*Ill at ease.*] How say you?

COLLEY. Nay, 't is true, sir. [*To* NICK.] Art thou the new boy? Come down and help us sing. Come down and shout with us in the street. [*Other boys enter, clustering around the door.*]

NICK. [*Staring at* COLLEY.] Thou look'st like Robin Getley of Stratford town. Art his twin?

COLLEY. [*Laughing.*] Nay. I was not hatched from a Robin's egg.— 'T is Nicholas Skylark, boys.

BOYS. Come on, Nick.— Come with us. The Queen hath sent for us!

NICK. The Queen — hath sent — for us?

COLLEY. For thee and me and all of us, to come to Court and sing. Hurrah for good Queen Bess!

BOYS. Hurrah, hurrah, for good Queen Bess! — Come on, Nick! — Help us sing in the street. [*They suddenly stop, and cheer:*] Hurrah for Master Gyles!

GYLES. [*Folding up the message, slowly.*] Master Carew, the Queen hath summoned my lads, to sing before the court of her Gracious Majesty, a week to-morrow day; — for the first time, sir, in a good six years. Thy boy, sir,— his fortune 's made. Here 's my hand on it!

BOYS. Hurrah for Nick Skylark!

GYLES. Be off, ye rogues! Ye frisk like fishes in the depths of the briny sea.

BOYS. Hurrah for the fishes in the sea! Hurrah!

GYLES. Soft, ye knaves! Save thy throats for good Queen Bess.

BOYS. Hurrah for good Queen Bess!

GYLES. Be still, I say, ye good-for-nothing varlets; or ye sha'n't have pie and ale to-morrow night.— But, marry, now, ye *shall* have pie and ale — aye, pie and ale without stint; for ye are good lads, and have pleased the Queen at last; and I am as proud of ye as a peacock is of his own tail.

BOYS. Hurrah for the Queen — and the pie — and the ale! Hurrah for the peacock and his tail.— Ho, a rime! — Now, all together:

Hurrah for the Queen, and the pie, and the ale!
Hurrah for the peacock; hurrah for his tail!
Hurrah for hurrah, and again hurray —
We 're going to Court in a week and a day
To sing before the Queen!

CICELY. [*Leaving her place by her father's chair.*] Art going, Nick?

NICK. May I go?

CAREW. Aye, but be not long.

NICK. I 'll not.

GYLES. And watch that honey-throat of thine lest the night-wind steal its sweetness.

NICK. I 'll watch, sir.

GOOLE. [*Who has come in sourly at the noise; to* CAREW.] I 'll watch, too!

CAREW. It matters little now — they 've took the boy.

GOOLE. I know a dingy lane down Billingsgate, where the lad could ne'er be found — by the ware-

house sheds along the water-front, under Fish-street Hill. I could hide him well enough.

CAREW. Nay, it will not need, my pretty knave. That play is done.

[NICK *goes out with the boys, all singing as they go — their music fading away.* GOOLE *exit after them.*]

GYLES. Good lads, good lads.— Well, Master Carew, thy boy must be ready to go to practise at nine in the morning.— 'T is a happy night for me, sir, and well for thee the day thou plucked this jewel of a skylark.— I bid ye good even, sir. Good even, Mistress Cicely. [*Exit, muttering:*] *Primus Magister Scholarum. . . .*

CICELY. [*Coming to* CAREW, *who has been staring after the precentor, with a troubled look upon his face; softly.*] Oh, Daddy, will he sing before the Queen herself?

CAREW. Aye, lass. I fear we 've lost the lad I brought to be thy playmate. He will be famous in the twinkling of an eye.

CICELY. But, Daddy, will he come no more to sing for thee and me?

CAREW. I fear me, little one. Truly, I fear me, he 'll not.

CICELY. And why not, Daddy?

CAREW. Why, dear lass, that silver throat of his will so charm the Queen she 'll never let him out of her hearing again.

CICELY. But he will come back to stay with us?

CAREW. That, I cannot tell.

CICELY. Then what will his mother do? Thou wast going to send him back to Stratford.

CAREW. I know, I know.— But come, thou must be trotting off to bed. [*He snuffs out all but two candles, and the room grows dark, except for the fire on the hearth.*]

CICELY. [*Yawning.*] Aye, I be very full o' dreams; that is because last night I sat up half the night to wait for thee. Thou must not dice so late again. [*She puts her arms around his neck.*]

CAREW. [*Kissing her.*] Thou art thine own sweet mother's child.— Nay, I 'll kiss away thy yawns. [*Enter* NICK.]

CICELY. [*Leaping up as* NICK *enters, radiant, and rushing towards him.*] Oh, Nick! dear Nick, how long thou hast been gone!

NICK. And, Cicely, to-morrow week I go to see the Queen. To-morrow week we sing at Court before good Queen Bess.

CICELY. 'T will be lonely here without thee.

NICK. I 'll soon be back again.

CAREW. [*Sadly.*] But what of Stratford, Nick?

NICK. Why — why, Master Carew, thou 'lt let me go and see my mother now, for I will sing my very best, to bring thee credit and the Queen's good will, and then thou canst not say me nay.

CAREW. And will not neither, lad. Thou wilt come to see us soon again, my lad?

NICK. Why, to be sure I will.

CICELY. [*Softly.*] If thou shouldst not, I 'd run to *thee.*

NICK. Wouldst truly, Cicely? I 'll come again to fetch thee by and by. When I ha' told my mother all, she 'll be thy mother, too.

CAREW. [*As* CICELY *puts her head on her arm against his shoulder, and begins to sob.*] Why, Cicely lass, be not so sad. [*To* NICK.] Thou makest both our hearts to ache, we love thee so.

Nay, lass, thou 'lt see him again in the morning.— There, peace; and he shall sing for thee again, if thou wilt smile.— Wilt not, Nick?

NICK. Aye, Master Carew.

CAREW. Then off with thee to slumberland, and Nick will speed thee thither with his song, whilst I sit here awhile and mend this dying fire.

[CICELY *kisses* CAREW *and* NICK *good night, and exit slowly to her little room behind one of the portières.* NICK *follows, to the screened couch, after* CAREW *has kissed him tenderly upon the forehead.* CAREW *lights another candle,* CICELY *having taken one of the two remaining lighted ones, and sits down wearily by the fireside, alone.* NICK *sings a bar or two of the madrigal; but at length his voice dies down drowsily, and he is still.* CAREW *gets up, takes one of the candles, and, going softly to the screen, moves it partially aside and gazes in upon the boy, shading the candle with his hand.* NICK *has laid his cloak and outer clothes at the foot of the bed, and is fast asleep in bed.*]

Thou dear-beloved, foolish lad! To dream that *I* could keep thee when once the Queen hath heard thee sing! A freed skylark come back to its cage?

No, never. Thou 'lt catch the skirts of glory in thine hand, and tread the heels of happy chance, but not come back again to me.— Ai, lad, I would thou wert my son!

[*He takes in some sweetmeats to lay beside* NICK'S *pillow; then comes out hurriedly, replacing the screen; stops to look in affectionately at* CICELY, *who is also fast asleep; throws her a kiss silently, and draws the portière there. Then he goes to the outer door, listens a moment, bars it carefully; he comes to a secret panel in the wall, carved with a cherub's head, and stands before it with a queer, hesitating look upon his face. Silently slipping aside the carved panel, he takes from the hollow wall an inlaid rosewood box, a woman's slipper, and a dusty gittern tied with a faded ribbon about its neck. Gazing at these, he starts to tune the gittern, but a string snaps.*]

Aye, the string is snapped; — my strings *all* are snapped! [*He opens the box and takes out a woman's riding glove and a miniature upon ivory, which he holds up to the light.*] Eyes like her mother's, and her voice, too. [*Then he takes out a bag of money from the wall, goes to the nearest door and cautiously tries the latch. Then spread-*

ing the heap of coins upon the table, he counts them into three piles, saying over and over:] One for me, and one for thee, and two for Cicely Carew.— One for me, and one for thee, and two for Cicely Carew.— One for me, and one for thee, and two for Cicely Carew. [*Goes on piling the coins.*] — I must win to-night. Gad's boons! I cannot lose unless the dice be cogged. Aye, but Fulk Sandells is a silky rogue at the dice.— Ha! [*Claps his hand to his poniard.*] — One for me, and one for thee, and two for Cicely Carew.— Ah! — *none* for me, but one for thee, and two for Cicely Carew!

[*As he sweeps two of the piles into bright yellow buckskin bags, a coin drops noisily upon the floor. He starts, and closes the panel like a flash. Then, peering right and left, he blows out the candles. The panel is heard opened softly again, a chink of money, the closing of the panel. He is heard sweeping the other pile of coins into his wallet. The outer door is unlocked and closed again. A stairway creaks. Silence.*

Absolute darkness as the CURTAIN *slowly falls.*]

[End of ACT III]

ACT IV

SCENE 1

[*Throne room of the royal palace, Greenwich. An afternoon of the week following. Magnificent appointments, curtained entrances, and splendid throne to the left, with a velvet canopy under which, in pearls,* "*Vivat Regina Elizabetha.*" *A large double curtain at the back of the room, which, when parted, discloses a small practical platform and a larger one with extensive room painted in perspective. Over the doorway here and also over the great door to the right, a great golden rose, with the motto below,* "*Dieu et mon droit.*"

Queen Elizabeth is on the throne, with attendants, courtiers, a Venetian ambassador, pages, SHAKESPEARE, JONSON, *and other players. Two guards, with halberds, stand at the heavy door to the right.*

Scene opens with orchestral curtain music of an old English aria. As curtain rises, orchestra music ceases, the inner curtain is parted, and

COLLEY, *dressed as a girl, comes forward on the small platform at the rear.*]

COLLEY. And so doth end this masque of Summertime and Spring, wherein both claimed to be best loved. They 've had their say of wit and humor, and each her part of songs and dance; and win who may, fair Summertime or merry Spring, the winner is but *that* [*snapping his fingers*] beside our Queen! God save Queen Bess!

[*Court laughs and claps.* NICK *appears beside* COLLEY, *and they sing a duet, as a flute, viol, and harp, on the stage (within), strike in with the same aria played previously by the orchestra, accompanying them.*

For the song, unless some especially appropriate Elizabethan lyric is used, it would be perhaps best to use "Hey, laddie, hark to the merry, merry lark!" or "Pack, clouds, away," or "Hark, hark! the lark," as before, since the duet effect will avoid any monotony of repetition.

Skylark warbling at the end. Animated applause by the Court as they bow, and, with a final flourish of the instruments, exeunt. Then the applause bursts out tumultuously as ELIZABETH, *dropping her fan, leads it heart-*

ily again. NICK *and* COLLEY *reappear, bow once more, and exeunt.*]

QUEEN. [*With bright eyes, laughing, to the Venetian ambassador, who seems to be in a dream.*] It is a good song, signor!

AMBASSADOR. [*Bowing low.*] A very good song, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Ah, there are no songs like English songs — there is no land like England — *my* England! [*To* PAGE.] Attend! I will speak with those lads.

[*Pages run behind scenes. Audience whispers.* AMBASSADOR *stoops to pick up the* QUEEN'S *fan. Enter* NICK *and* COLLEY, *kneel before the* QUEEN, *bowing before her on the dais. As they come in, all applaud, calling "Bravo! Bravo! — Well done, lads!" The* QUEEN *leans forward slightly to raise them, smiling, saying heartily:*]

Stand, dear lads. Be lifted up by thine own singing, as our hearts have been uplifted by thy songs. And name me the price of thy sweet song. [*Tapping* COLLEY'S *cheek with her fan.*] Come, what wilt thou have of me, fair lad in maid's attire?

COLLEY. [*Tremblingly.*] That I may stay in the palace forever and sing for your Majesty.

QUEEN. That is right prettily asked. Thou shalt indeed, my singing page.— And thou, Master Lark [*fanning the hair back from* NICK'S *forehead with her beautiful fan*] with thy song of the sky — wilt thou too be of our choir and household?

NICK. [*Looking up at the burning torches on the wall, and drawing a long breath, as the* QUEEN *speaks, and then looking down again as if with dazzled eyes.*] Nay. Let me go home.

QUEEN. [*After a surprised pause.*] Surely, boy, 't is an ill-considered speech, or else this home of thine must be a famous place.

NICK. [*As some of the maids of honor titter, and a courtier laughs, he looks up quickly, squaring his shoulders; half-defiantly.*] I would rather be there than here.

QUEEN. [*Visibly annoyed.*] Thou art more curt than courteous. Is it not good enough for thee here?

NICK. I could na live in such a place.

QUEEN. [*With a dangerous light in her eyes.*] Marry, art thou so choice? These others find no fault with the life.

NICK. Then they be born to it, or they could abide it no more than I — they would na fit.

A COURTIER. [*Laughing.*] Haw, haw!

QUEEN. [*With a quick glance at him.*] Old pegs have been made to fit new holes before to-day, and the trick can be done again.— But what hath put thee so out of conceit with our best-beloved palace?

NICK. I canna bide in a place so fine. 'T is not homelike. I could na sleep in the bed last night.

QUEEN. [*Angrily, as the Venetian ambassador smiles in his beard.*] What, we commanded good beds! This shall be seen to.

NICK. [*Hastily.*] Oh, it *was* a good bed — a very good bed, your Majesty! But the mattress puffed up like a cloud in a bag, and almost smothered me; and it was so soft and hot that it gave me a fever.

QUEEN. [*Leaning back in her seat and laughing, at which the whole court joins in.*] Upon my word, it is an odd skylark cannot sleep in feathers. What didst thou do, forsooth?

NICK. I slept in the coverlid on the floor. It is na hurt — I dusted the place well,— and I slept like a top.

QUEEN. [*Laughing.*] Now, verily, if it be floors, we have acres to spare. Come, we are ill used to begging — thou 'lt stay? [NICK *shakes his head.*] *Ma foi!* What is it sticks in thy throat? [*She taps with her fan, as he still stands silent.*] Thou art bedazzled like. Think twice — preferment does not bloom on hedgerows every day; thou wilt accept? [NICK *slowly shakes his head.*] Go then. [*She shrugs her shoulders, illy pleased, and turning toward* COLLEY, *takes him by the hand and draws him closer to her, smiling at his guise.*] Thy comrade hath more wit.

NICK. [*Quietly, loosing his hold at last on* COLLEY'S *hand.*] He hath no mother. I would rather have my mother than his wit.

QUEEN. [*Turning sharply back, her keen eyes sparkling, yet soft.*] Thou art no fool. [*A little murmur runs through the room. She sits a moment, silent, studying his face.*] Or if thou art, upon my word I like the breed.— Aye, sirs [*sitting up very straight and looking into the faces of her court*], a lad who loves his mother thus doth make a man who loves his native land —'t is no bad streak in the blood. Master Skylark, home to London thou shalt go this very night.

NICK. I do na live in London —

QUEEN. What matters the place? Live wheresoever thine heart doth please. It is enough — so. Thou mayst kiss our hand.

[NICK *kneels and kisses her hand as if in a dream. Then a page touches his arm as he arises, and bowing backward from the throne, comes with him to the double curtain. There* MASTER GYLES *meets him with the torn manuscript of the music in his hand, and laying his hand upon the boy's head, says as they exeunt and the curtain comes together again:*]

GYLES. Thy cake is burned to a coal.

QUEEN. And now, my lords, 't is two hours yet till Master Shakespeare and his friends act for us his Dream play of Midsummer. [*She holds out her hand commandingly.* SHAKESPEARE *bows low, steps forward, kneels upon one knee, and kisses her hand.*] Arise, thou Prince of Players! Anon we 'll sue thee to write a special play for us. We would see that jovial fat man Falstaff lost in love. 'T would make rare sport. But more of this to-night.— I bid ye all make merry.

[QUEEN *rises. Exeunt ceremoniously,* QUEEN *and court, except* SHAKESPEARE, JONSON, *and two players. Guards remain also. As exeunt, choir-boys may be partially re-*

vealed on platform stage, singing a recessional]

JONSON. [*Clapping* SHAKESPEARE *on the shoulder.*] Fie upon thee, Will! Royal favor at last, and sober as a church?

SHAKESPEARE. Aye, Ben; but Fame 's a candle's gleam. My heart is dark.

JONSON. What, Will! Thy son?

SHAKESPEARE. Aye. All on a sudden.

JONSON. [*Feelingly.*] Ah, Will; the sweetest glory hath then a bitter taste.— Heigho! But Will, thou still must come and see my little Ben? He 's plump as a cannon ball.

SHAKESPEARE. I 'll come — some day. [*Smiling.*] Give him my love. [*A page enters, and whispers to one of the players.*] What is it, lad?

1 PLAYER. A boy who saith that he must see thee, Master, on his life.

2 PLAYER. Nay, Will, he 'll only pluck thy pocket with a doleful lie.

SHAKESPEARE. There 's naught in it, Ned, to pick.

PAGE. He saith he comes from Stratford town —

JONSON. Then tell him to go back again. We 've sucked the sweets from Stratford.

SHAKESPEARE. Go bring him in.

JONSON. Nay, Will; this makes the third within the month.— Here, boy, give him this shilling, and tell him to be off.

SHAKESPEARE. [*Stopping the other's shilling with his hand.*] We 'll see him first. [*Exit* PAGE.]

JONSON. Oh, Willy, nilly! Wilt be a kite to float all the draggle-tails that flutter down from Warwickshire?

SHAKESPEARE. Why, Ben, 't is not the kite that floats the tail, but the wind which floats both kite and tail. Thank God, we 've caught the rising wind; so, hey for draggle-tails! — we 'll take up all we can.

JONSON. [*Laughing a great, bluff-hearted laugh.*] Tush, Will, as always thou hast taken the wind out of my kite. [*Reënter* PAGE, *with* NICK.] Nay! Why, 't is the lad who sang. And round-eyed as the moon.

NICK. [*Excitedly.*] Master Will — Master Will Shakespeare!

SHAKESPEARE. Well, my lad, what wilt thou have of me?

NICK. Oh, sir, I only want to go home. Will ye not take me home?

SHAKESPEARE. Why, lad, canst not go of thine own sweet will?

JONSON. 'Stead of making our sweet Will take thee?

NICK. Sirs, I do still fear that Master Carew will na leave me go.

JONSON. Why! What! art *thou* Carew's silver-throated lark?

NICK. Aye, masters; he hath stolen me from home a long fortnight, and I — and I — I do na know — my mother may be dead by now.

JONSON. This shall be seen to.

SHAKESPEARE. Who is thy mother, lad?

NICK. Dame Margaret Attwood, sir.

SHAKESPEARE. [*Startled.*] What? Margaret Attwood? of Stratford? Art thou her Nicholas? Why, lad, I know her passing well. [*Significantly and reminiscently.*] Margery, sweet Margery! — How came Carew to take you from her?

NICK. Why, sir, at first, I ran away, because my father would na leave me see the Admiral's Company play.

SHAKESPEARE. [*Under his breath.*] Aye, I know the man. [*To* JONSON.] As hard as iron, but true as steel.—

NICK. Then Master Carew kept me for my voice, and had me sing with Paul's boys. He hath kept me ever in duress; and I be still afeard he will na —

SHAKESPEARE. Have no fear, my lad; he shall not stay thee more.

NICK. I will never leave my mother again!

SHAKESPEARE. Right, lad; do not leave her till thou must.

NICK. If I had never run away! —

SHAKESPEARE. [*Putting both arms around the lad, and looking down into his face.*] Nay, then: we will amend thy trouble speedily. All birds hie home in spring — and I do, too.

NICK. And wilt thou —

SHAKESPEARE. Take thee home to thy mother? Aye, marry, that will I.

NICK. [*Breathlessly.*] Oh, when, sir?

SHAKESPEARE. We shall start for Stratford to-morrow.

A VOICE. [*Outside, calling sharply.*] What, ho! What, ho! Within; what, ho!

GUARD. [*Replying.*] Who calls?

VOICE. [*Shouting.*] A message for players.

GUARD. Enter, message.

JONSON. What 's this? Hullo! Tom Heywood!

HEYWOOD.. [*Entering breathlessly.*] What, there! — Will; — and thou, Ben,— both —! Why, Nick, art thou still here?

JONSON. How now? What 's thy wild news, brings thee so quickly back to the Queen's gate?

HEYWOOD. Oh, there 's to-do — for players — at the Falcon Inn.— Gaston Carew hath — stabbed Fulk Sandells — dead as a door-nail — for cheating at the dice — and hath been taken by the watch! —

SHAKESPEARE. Is this the very truth?

HEYWOOD. Dear Will, the very truth.— Dick Jones was there — and saw it done.— They 've

haled him off to Newgate Gaol! — And, lad [*to* NICK], he would see thee — and begs thou wouldst come at once to him —

NICK. [*Drawing closer to* SHAKESPEARE.] Master Carew?

HEYWOOD. Lad, he cannot harm nor take thee if he would. Wilt come?

NICK. Oh, Master Heywood, I dare na.

HEYWOOD. I 'll fetch thee safely back. 'T is the last thing he 'll ever ask of thee; there 's something he would say to thee he cannot leave unsaid. And, lad, he 'll go unshrift, he sweareth, if thou wilt not come.

JONSON. An' thou hast peace to lend the dying —

SHAKESPEARE. Lend it. Best so, Nicholas.

NICK. I 'll go, then.— But 't is more for Cicely's sake than his.

SHAKESPEARE. [*As exeunt* NICK *and* HEYWOOD.] I hope no harm may come to him.

JONSON. A most sweet lad.

SHAKESPEARE. The son of gentle Margaret Page, who married the sulky tanner.

JONSON. With Carew gone, the Admiral's men will lack their master-spirit.

SHAKESPEARE. True, Ben.— A brave heart and a bold tongue, but a wild life to boot.— Yet many a weary day he cheered me on when skies hung leaden o'er us both. But Carew hath a daughter. We must send at once for Cicely, and see her well bestowed.

JONSON. Aye, she should be fetched straight away.

SHAKESPEARE. I 'll take the lass home to Stratford town with me, to be a sister to mine own Susanna.— Ned Hawthorn, thou wilt go for her, I know. Thou canst return in time?

2 PLAYER. [*Quickly.*] Right gladly. Aye, I 'm off. [*Exit.*]

SHAKESPEARE. 'T was just four years ago saw Marlowe's bright flame quenched. And now Carew will travel to that undiscovered country from whose bourn not even a son returns to tell us aught —

JONSON. Dear Will; tak' 't not so to heart.— Come, read us the new-made lines from thy Summer Dream. Hast it by thee?

SHAKESPEARE. Aye. [*Unfolds the manuscript.*] — All our life 's a dream, Ben. But there are better dreams, thank God! Aye, there are better dreams. In that we still do hope.— There 's a device of magic in this Midsummer fantasy of mine; — in the world there 's magic, too. A true friend, a simple faith, a warm heart, and a merry face like thine, old Jolly-Jest, are medicine for woe.— I have retouched it here.— You call to mind the fairy King commandeth Puck to fetch a magic flower; and Puck replieth:

> "I 'll put a girdle round about the earth
> In forty minutes.—"

JONSON. Aye, and still I say thy forty minutes is too soon. Thy fairies are but human forms at best. Say ten-score minutes mayhap; not a paltry forty.

SHAKESPEARE. Nay; rather, it should be more quick, not more slow — thought flies quicker than the lightning's flash. May not thy mind e'en now dart to far Cathay and come again whilst one may twink an eye? And fairies are but thoughts; thoughts, fairies — good and ill. Come, now, 't were best to cut the term in two and leave but twenty there.

JONSON. Tush! Fie upon thee, Will. Ha, ha, ha! Thou art a regular flibbertigibbet. But I 'll catch thee napping yet, old gossip, and fill thee so full of pepper-holes that thou wilt leak epigrams. — Nay, leave thy forty be.— What more?

SHAKESPEARE. I told thee thoughts are fairies all, the messengers of our living dreams. I tell thee now that thou and I and all of us scribblers are makers of dream-worlds, and every one we make is neither more nor less substantial than ourselves. [*Turning pages.*] I put it thus, from Duke Theseus' lips:

" The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."

JONSON. Aye, Will, 't is true; most true, and none so ill expressed.— But look, what now?

SHAKESPEARE. Ill tidings, from his face. [2 PLAYER, HAWTHORN, *enters hastily, with* BUTLER.] What news, Ned, what news!

2 PLAYER. I was but halfway to the river, my masters, when I ran full upon Carew's own but-

ler, Jem Barstow here.— He saith the constables have taken charge in the house already, and that the varlet, Gregory Goole, came in great haste an hour before, and without a word of what had befallen Carew, took Cicely away.

Butler. A did na question un much, Zurs, for a feared the rogue summat and judged un to have authority.

Jonson. There 's villainy doing.

Shakespeare. 'T is bad indeed. He hath her 'prisoned in some foul den, I warrant, waiting on ransom.

2 Player. I fear it, Will.

Butler. Aye, Zurs.— An' he said beside, Carew 'd told un to fetch the Skylark lad from Court as soon as un 'd finished here.

Jonson. Then we may trap him.

Shakespeare. I fear me now the boy will come to harm.

Jonson. The rascal means no good.

Page. [*Entering.*] Master Will Shakespeare! Her Majesty the Queen will see thee in her garden. Follow me. [*Trumpet without.*]

JONSON. We 'll search the town until we find the maid.

SHAKESPEARE. And then, with lad and lass, away for Stratford town!

[*Complete darkness. Drop* CURTAIN *at once descends for the next scene. No pause for curtain, however.*]

SCENE 2

[*A dungeon corridor in Newgate prison. Rough, flagstone floor, or simply rushes, strewn thickly. All is painted upon a drop-curtain, so that there is no interruption of the action from the previous scene; but there are practical barred openings in the cell doors. At the extreme right is a heavy outer door at right angles, front, to the drop-curtain, and this door swings inward. At the cell to the extreme left is a prisoner within, who is later visible. Next to this is* CAREW'S *cell. Black backing for the cells.*

Sounds of quarreling, people moving restlessly about, murmurs, groans, and clanking of chains. Knocking at outer door.

The complete darkness which closed the preced-

ing scene persists, until a guard enters, left, with a torch, changing it to a dim light. He sticks the torch into a bracket on the wall.]

Guard. [*Gruffly.*] Hullo! What, ho! Who calls?

Voice. [*Without.*] A visitor for Carew. Admit us — here 's a permit.

Guard. [*Unlocks door. Enter* Heywood *with* Nick.] Advance! [*Looks at paper which* Heywood *gives him.*] Gaston Carew the player?

Heywood. Faugh! 'T is dark and foul as a pestilence. No windows here, save yon barred breathing-hole. [*Looking up to the left.*]

A Prisoner. [*Appearing at bars, screaming.*] God curse ye! God curse ye all there!

Heywood. Be not afraid, my lad. None can harm you here.

Guard. The permit says but one. It was a boy he said would come, so just the boy comes in.

Heywood. Nay, I must stay here, too.

Guard. Must? I am the only one who dare say "must" in Newgate. Out with thee; but a shilling first for the boy. [Heywood *hands him*

a shilling; then is led ungently to the door, which shuts upon him with a bang. As the guard locks it, sounds of ribald singing are heard, the dragging of chains again, and quarreling.]

PRISONER. [*Visible again, moaning.*] Cesare el Moro! Cesare el Moro! To hang on Tyburn. God! I 'll hang in hell forever! [*Screaming.*] I 'll hang in hell for ye all, I say, God curse ye!

GUARD. [*Savagely.*] Peace, thou murdering Spaniard, or I 'll cut thy throat! [*Approaching the next cell door, he rattles the bars and chains, roughly shouting:*] Here, wake up, within there! [CAREW *appears, ironed hand and foot, with haggard face.*] A shilling's worth, ye mind, and not another wink. [*He retires to outer door.*]

CAREW. And thou hast truly come, to say farewell to him thou hatest so? — To reach the courts of glory and the Queen's bright grace, and yet come here to ill-starred twilight and to me! — Ai, lad, I would thou wert mine own, own son; yet Heaven spare thee father such as I! — But, Nick, thou wilt not hate me any more. 'T will not be worth thy while; the night is coming fast.

NICK. Why, sir, 't will soon be day again; and thou 'lt again be out.

CAREW. Out? Aye, on Tyburn gallows.— I have taken my last cue; the play is nearly out, and the people will be going home. It has been a wild play, Nick, and ill-played.

GUARD. [*Gruffly.*] Here, if ye 've anything to say, be saying it. 'T is a shilling's worth, ye mind.

CAREW. [*Lifting up his head in the old haughty way, he claps his hand to his hip for his poniard. It is no longer there. He wipes his hand hurriedly upon his jerkin; then hangs his head dejectedly, and a shudder passes over him.*] Ah-h; — I had forgot!

NICK. Ye sent for me, sir.

CAREW. Yes, yes; I sent for thee. I have something to tell thee, Nick.— Thou 'lt deal fairly with my Cicely? Aye, surely; yes. I trust thee, Nick.— There 's money, much good gold. [*At sudden clank of chains in the next cell,* CAREW *turns quickly around.*] Tsst! What 's that? — 'T is my sick fancy.— Well, then.— [*More softly.*] Hark 'e — thou knowest the old oak wainscot in the dining-hall, and the carven panel by the Spanish chest? [NICK *nods.*] Good, then. Upon the panel is a cherub, and — tsst! what 's that, I say?

NICK. I know not, sir; I think some one is listening there.

CAREW. [*Moving a few feet with difficulty, his own being two of them.*] I say [*whispers*], upon the panel there —

PRISONER. [*Abandoning his listening posture, and shouting.*] Yah, yah, yah! thou gallows' bird!

CAREW. Peace, thou dog! Thou Spanish infidel!

PRISONER. Curse thee, curse thee! Thou 'rt damned as black as hell.

CAREW. Be quiet, thou cut-throat! — I dare not let him hear. [*Guard approaches.*] The very walls of Newgate leak.

PRISONER. Yah, yah, yah; God curse ye doubly black.

CAREW. Yet I must tell thee, Nick —

GUARD. Don't be all night.

CAREW.— Or stay! Would Will Shakespeare come? Why, here, I 'll send him word.

NICK. I 'll tell him, sir. He 's promised me to take me home to Stratford.

Carew. God bless him, now, for that.— He 'll come; — Will Shakespeare never bore a grudge; and I shall so soon go where are no grudges, envy, storms, nor noise, but silence and the soft lap of everlasting sleep. [*Huskily.*] Nick, last night I dreamed I heard thee singing; but 't was where green fields and murmuring streams went circling round a little town; there was a rustic cottage — methought 't was Stratford, Nick. 'T was there I heard thee sing first, lad. Thou 'lt go there soon again, now; and, Nick, for thine own mother's sake, do not altogether hate Gaston Carew; he was not so bad a man as he might easily have been.

Guard. [*Growling.*] Come; have done. 'T is a fat shilling's worth. [*Noise of quarreling and groaning renewed. Guard sharpens his pike on a stone, with a rasping sound. Another guard comes into the corridor from an unseen door to the left, letting in a flood of curses, groans, and noise as he does so. He goes toward first guard and talks with him.*]

Carew. [*Holding* Nick's *hands.*] God bless thee, Nick! I love thee, lad. Dost thou not love me just a little? Come, say thou lovest me.

NICK. [*Soberly.*] Nay, Master Carew; I do na love thee, and I will na say I do, sir; but I pity thee with all my heart. And, sir, if thy being out would keep me stolen, still I think I 'd wish thee out — for Cicely's sake.— But, Master Carew, do na break my hands.

CAREW. [*Huskily, releasing* NICK'S *hands.*] I will not seek to be excused to thee. I 've prisoned thee as that clod prisons me; yet, Nick, it makes my heart ache now, that 't was not I who set thee free. For, truly, lad, I meant to send thee home. I did, upon my word, and on the remnant of mine honor.

1 GUARD. [*As a heavy bell begins to toll, very slowly.*] Quick! 'T is the signal to bar the gates.

CAREW. Wilt kiss me, lad? — Thou 'lt send Will Shakespeare! And, oh, Nick, thou 'lt keep my Cicely from all harm?

NICK. I 'll do my best.

1 GUARD. I 'll ding thee out of this. [*Raises heavy bunch of keys threateningly. Pushes him towards the door, as* CAREW *waves his hand through the bars. Then exit through unseen door to the left.*]

2 GUARD. [*Taking* NICK, *whose eyes are blinded with tears, towards the heavy outer door.*] Didst come alone?

NICK. Nay. With Master Heywood.

2 GUARD. A-a. Yon without. He 'll pay another shilling first, to get ye back. [*Unbars door and swings it open. Enter* GOOLE, *in* HEYWOOD'S *cloak and cap.* NICK *does not recognize him at first, and going to him, tear-blinded, takes the hand he stretches out.* 2 GUARD *stands in the doorway.*] Another shilling, sir. 'T was over time.

GOOLE. [*Paying.*] Aye, two; with thanks.

NICK. [*Starting back.*] Why, where is Master Heywood?

GOOLE. He could na wait for thee. I 'm sent to bring thee back.

NICK. Nay; thou liest, rogue! I will na go with thee.

2 GUARD. Get along, Jackanapes, or spend the night in gaol.

NICK. But, sir, 't was not he brought me here. There is some trick. I fear foul play.— Master Carew!

"God bless thee, Nick! I love thee, lad."

CAREW. [*Whose white face has been barely visible against the bars of his cell, sternly to* GOOLE, *who shrinks back against the wall at his voice.*]— Beware, Gregory Goole! Beware! If thou doest aught of ill to him I 'll put a spell upon thee that will send thy soul to hell!

2 GUARD. Out ye go now, both of ye.

GOOLE. Best come quietly. She will na like thee with a bloody face.

NICK. She? Who? Thou rogue! Hast thou got Cicely?

GOOLE. Aye, marry; that I have. Ye 'll each fetch a pretty penny by and by. And hark 'e; be less glib with that "rogue" of thine, or I will baste thy back.

NICK. I be na feared of thee, thou rogue!

GOOLE. [*Striking him across the face.*] Thou little imp!

CAREW. [*In a hissing whisper.*] By my soul, 'fore God, I swear — [*The rest is unintelligible muttering, and only his hands are seen, clutching the bars.*]

NICK. [*Throwing back his shoulders, hotly.*] Do na dare to strike me again, thou rogue!

Thou 'lt pay dear for this, when Master Shakespeare comes for me. I say I be na feared of thee; and if thou harmest Cicely, thou 'lt rue it sorely. [*Exit, with* GOOLE. CAREW'S *hands vanish from the bars.*]

GUARD. [*Swinging the door upon them.*] Ods bobs! A pretty lad, and spirited.— Two paltry shillings! I would I had the buckle off his cloak.

PRISONER. [*Groaning.*] 'T is bitter cold. All 's dark and cold. Curse ye, the wind is cold, I say.—

GUARD. [*Kicking cell door savagely.*] Peace, cur!

[CURTAIN]

[End of ACT IV]

ACT V

[SHAKESPEARE'S *garden, at New Place, Stratford. Five days later. Early morning; pinkish light. The "Great House" at back of stage, with gable end in the center, and windows each side. Paths to left and right. Rose-trees and shrubbery and a little arbor in the foreground. A table, sheltered under a tree, with fruit, trays of nuts and raisins and little cakes, silver cups and decanters set thereon. A bench and two stools elsewhere.*

SHAKESPEARE *discovered, partly hidden among bushes, with a pair of pruning-shears, trimming the rose-trees. He seems worried at first, but changes to good cheer when* HEYWOOD *appears.*

A casement in the gable opens wide, and HEYWOOD'S *head and shoulders appear. His head is bandaged; but this bandage is concealed later when he reappears with his hat on.*]

SHAKESPEARE. Good morrow, Master Early-bird! [*Tosses him a rose.*] Hast rested well?

HEYWOOD. Aye, Will.— But what news more?

SHAKESPEARE. If no news be good news, Tom, all is yet well. [*Aside.*] And yet my — [*shakes his head*] — messenger hath not come. He should be here by sun-up, for he was to ride all night.— How comes the sun?

HEYWOOD. Just up; the river is afire with it now. [*Sunlight strikes the gable.*] 'T would be a lovely day indeed if the Skylark were here to sing.

SHAKESPEARE. Take it not so to heart that thou wast tricked. Thank God, the dagger struck not home.— We 've done our best to find them, and now must trust to higher powers. And truly, Tom, so fair a morning should not bring foul news. The day dawns, beautiful indeed.— Ah! [*Stretching himself to his full height, and laughing softly.*] It is the sweetest music in the world — morning, spring, and God's dear sunshine; it bringeth hope; fills full the soul; starts kindness brewing in the heart, like sap in a withered bud. Thank God for life!

HEYWOOD. Had the rascal not struck me from behind —

SHAKESPEARE. Peace, Tom. Think ill no more of him. He 'll reap his harvest soon.—

Thou 'dst better have thy breakfast. 'T will ease thy brooding mind. Shall 't be sent up?

HEYWOOD. Nay; I 'll come down. [*Exit, from window.*]

[SHAKESPEARE *busy about the rose-trees again for a moment. Then, the sound of rapid hoof-beats, growing louder. He listens intently till the sounds stop just off-stage.*]

MESSENGER. [*Entering in costume of a post-rider, horse-boots, mud-spattered coat, gloves, spurs, whip, and messenger's leathern budget swinging on strap over shoulder.*] Sir! To you.

SHAKESPEARE. Thy news.

MESSENGER. They cannot be in London. We have sought both high and low.

SHAKESPEARE. Along the river front?

MESSENGER. Aye. They were lodged one night where Gaston told thee; but neither lad nor lass hath been seen since.

SHAKESPEARE. 'T is passing strange. And we have hunted after them the whole way up from London town, but never found a trace. A constable of Billingsgate brought word that they were seen to start for Stratford with a man of Coven-

try, and so we left at once. We came straight on through Coventry, yet found them neither there nor here.

MESSENGER. What says old Simon Attwood?

SHAKESPEARE. It seems he hath disowned the boy, and so before we went to him we waited for thy word.

JONSON. [*Entering from the house.*] What news?

SHAKESPEARE. They 've found naught yet.

JONSON. 'T is ill luck sure.

SHAKESPEARE. What sayest, Ben? To-morrow we 'll go back ourselves to search until we find them.

JONSON. Agreed.— But, sirrah, [*to* MESSENGER] thy message in detail.

MESSENGER. My fellows have sought everywhere. It is not possible they be still hid in London. But I have one sound grain of comfort. Three days ago — the day before I left — Goole was found drowned, dead, floating in the Thames by Barge-house Stairs.

JONSON. What?

MESSENGER. The children had not been with him for four days, we found.

SHAKESPEARE. Then they had 'scaped from him before. That 's sure. They must be still upon the way, but by the Warwick road.— Thanks for thy news, fellow. Thou 'st ridden well. Go to the buttery, man, and break thy fast. Then I 'll send to Warwick straight.— But, hold; what news of Gaston?

MESSENGER. I started two days since [*impressively*], an hour before the crack o' dawn, and on my way past Tyburn Hill, a black cart passed me with a man in irons and gyves upon his wrists.— I waved my hand. [*Raising his hand high as one signals a friend in a throng.*] "Farewell," said he. "Good night!"

JONSON. God rest his soul!

SHAKESPEARE. Amen! [*Exit* MESSENGER, *into the house.* JONSON *turns to the refreshment table.*]

JONSON. Where 's Burbage and the rest?

SHAKESPEARE. Gone for an appetizing walk, old hurly-burly Ben, whilst thou lay snoozing the dew-gemmed hours away. Art sure thou 'rt yet awake?

JONSON. Ah, Will, thou gentle, thieving rogue! [*Catching his hands.*] — How thou stealest one's heart with a glance of thine eye! One look of thine doth warm my soul.— Why, Will, thy quiet eye doth sparkle more than this good wine.— A verse! — Hold.— Softly — I have it now, entire. [*Recites, dramatically, or sings, with a cup of wine in his hand:*]

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I 'll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.

SHAKESPEARE. Go sing it to some Warwick maid, thou moonlight versifier.

JONSON. Be thou she, then.— Hearken again. — [*Plucking a rose.*] I 'll rime of this to thee. [*As before:*]

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honoring thee
As giving it a hope that there
It could not withered be;

But thou thereon didst only breathe
And sent'st it back to me;
Since when it glows, and smells, I swear,
Not of itself but thee!

[*Bows, kissing the rose, and puts it in his breast.*] Whatever falls this day we 'll celebrate thy purchase of this New Place here, in revelry most rare. New songs shall spring from every cup,—

SHAKESPEARE. Nay, but the children first, old friend. Then to our merriment. [*Sound of voices up the path.*]

1 PLAYER. [*Entering briskly, with others.*] News, Will! Great news! [*This actor should be the man who previously has played* GOOLE'S *part, for reasons that will be apparent later; but now, acting as quite a different individual, both in manner and make-up.*]

2 PLAYER. Jove, the best that was ever baked!

SHAKESPEARE. Hast found them?

1 PLAYER. Aye, that we have. They lodged o'er night at Warwick, having trudged from Coventry.

2 PLAYER. The weekly carrier 'd fetched them up as far as Coventry by his wagon-train from London.

JONSON. Where be they now?

1 PLAYER. We met them hard by the Warwick road, faring across the fields. We hailed them in thy name, and begged them come with us; but the lad would only stop to send his love to thee, likewise the little maid, and flinging us a promise to come to see thee soon, they both trudged on.

2 PLAYER. 'T was a winsome sight to see the Skylark's shining eyes as he hurried on towards Attwood's lane, with the little maid by his side.

SHAKESPEARE. [*Enter* HEYWOOD, *limping, with a cap upon his head.*] Tom, a good investment for thine ears!

HEYWOOD. Out with it, Will.

SHAKESPEARE. They 're found, man. They 're here. They 'll grace our feast this very day.

JONSON. Merry hearts! What a feast 't will be, with a Skylark for center-piece!

SHAKESPEARE. We 'll feast on reason —

JONSON. Reason on the feast; toast the company with wit —

SHAKESPEARE. And company the wit with toast.— But, look! [*Enter* NICK *and* CICELY,

hand in hand. All move towards them. SHAKESPEARE *meets them with out-stretched hands.*] Welcome, most welcome, Nicholas and Cicely!

JONSON. Lad, thou 'rt a credit to this old town of thine.

HEYWOOD. A plucky fellow, I say, right plucky, to bring the lass safe, too.

NICK. [*To* HEYWOOD.] Then Gregory did na kill thee, sir!

HEYWOOD. Nay, lad; thank God, he missed his aim!

JONSON. [*To* CICELY.] And thou art Gaston's little daughter. I knew thy father well. [*Continues to talk to her. She tells him of their adventures, animatedly.*]

SHAKESPEARE. [*To* NICK.] Thou young rogue, how thou hast forestalled us! Why, here we have been weeping for thee as lost or stolen again; and all the while thou wert coming straight to thine own sweet nest. How is thy beloved mother?

NICK. I ha' na seen my mother, sir. Father will na let me in.

SHAKESPEARE. Eh! what?

JONSON. What! how?

NICK. My father will na have me any more, sir — saith I shall never be his son again. Oh, Master Shakespeare, why did they ever steal me away from home?

HEYWOOD. What means all this?

NICK. He was working in the yard, sirs; and he — he said he was na father to stage-playing vagabond rogues; and closed the gate upon us both.

CICELY. He is a wicked, wicked man.

NICK. He is my father, Cicely.

CICELY. And thou dost hate *my* father so? Oh, Nick! [*To* JONSON.] He said he 'd set the constables on us if we would not be gone. I am too tired to go back that long and weary way. [2 PLAYER *brings up two stools for them to sit upon.*]

HEYWOOD. Why, this is a sorry tale. Does the man not know thou 'rt kept against thy will?

NICK. He will na leave me tell him. He would na even listen.

JONSON. The muckle shrew! Why, I 'll have this out with him. By Jupiter, I 'll read him reason with a vengeance! [*Hand on rapier.*]

Master Shakespere met them with outstretched hands.

SHAKESPEARE. Nay, Ben; a quarrel will not serve. This tanner is a bitter-minded, heavy-handed man; — he 'd only throw thee in a pickling-vat.

JONSON. What? Then he 'd never tan another hide.

SHAKESPEARE. And would that serve the purpose, Ben? The cure should better the disease: — the children must be thought about.

JONSON. The children? Why, then, this tanner calls us vagabonds. Yet vagabonds are gallows-birds, and gallows-birds are ravens. And ravens, men say, do foster forlorn children. Let us ravenous vagabonds, then, take these children for our own — Will, thou one, I t' other — and foster them praiseworthily.

HEYWOOD. Why, here, Ben Jonson, this is all very well for Will and thee; but where do I come in?

OTHERS. [*Respectively.*] Or Burbage? — Or Hemynge? — Or Condell?

SHAKESPEARE. [*Smiling.*] Aye. 'T is a pity if we cannot all stand together in this real play as well as in the make-believe. Kind hearts are trumps — make it a stock company, and let us all be in.

JONSON. Well, Tom, we cannot bar thee out.— Ye know, lads, Heywood comes to us, now that — [SHAKESPEARE *checks him, warningly*] — now that his contract with Carew binds him no more.

OTHERS. Why, good! Good, Tom!— Good, I say.— Hurrah!

1 PLAYER. With Will and Ben for meat and crust, Tom Heywood for the sauce, and us for seasoning, the Court shall say it never ate such master-pie.

2 PLAYER. We 'll make the halls of Whitehall ring, come New Year next, or Twelfth Night.

3 PLAYER. Aye, that we will, old gossip.— Here 's to th' immortal three, the Queen's bright triad of stars! [*All seize cups of wine.*]

1 PLAYER. Here 's to the company all!

2 PLAYER. And a health to our new Lord Chamberlain!

3 PLAYER. A toast to the twinkling trio!

HEYWOOD. And here 's to lad and lass!

SHAKESPEARE. [*Most solemnly and slowly.*] To Gaston Carew! [*One or two cross themselves quickly, while lifting their glasses; some bow their*

heads. There is a sudden hush. Then, brightly, but with deep feeling still:]

JONSON. And then — God save the Queen! [*All drink.*] — Come, a new trio, Will. [*Joining hands with* HEYWOOD *and* SHAKESPEARE, *sings:*]

Three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men be we
As e'er did sing on a day in Spring
Beneath a Stratford tree!

[*Laughter, as he comically dances at the finish, and cries of "Bravo, Ben! — Well done! — Bravo! — To 't again!" But* JONSON *only smiles and shakes his head, "Nay," still holding* SHAKESPEARE *by the arm, and releasing* HEYWOOD, *addresses the former:*] — Seriously, Will, besides his song, the lad will make a better *Rosalind* than Roger Prynne, for thy new play.

SHAKESPEARE. So he would. But before we put him into "As You Like It," suppose we ask him how he would like it.— Nick, thou hast heard what all these gentlemen have said — what hast thou to say, my lad?

NICK. Why, sirs, ye are all very kind,— very kind indeed, sirs; but — I — I just want to go

home, sirs; — oh, masters, I do want to see my mother!

[SHAKESPEARE *draws* NICK *to him comfortingly. As he does so,* HEYWOOD *slips out by the path, making a significant gesture.*]

SHAKESPEARE. Come, lad, we 'll take thee home now soon. All will be well, in time; in God's good time.— Come, tell us, Nick, how fared ye in thy wanderings?

NICK. [*As the others gather round.*] Why, sirs, 't were not so much to tell. Only —

CICELY. Only Nick was most brave and kind through all. He was a very prince.

JONSON. Good, sweetheart! And thou the princess then.

NICK. Gregory kept us locked up in a horrible place, by the river bank, where all was dirty alleyways and wharf-sheds strewn with bits of fish, and people past description — cold, hard, cruel folk.

CICELY. I canna bear to think of them! [*Shudders, shrinking close to* JONSON, *who puts his arm around her protectingly, smiling in his big way.*]

SHAKESPEARE. But how did ye escape?

NICK. 'T was this way, sir.— He took us out next morning, bound, he said, to flee away to France; but on the way — well — on the way — I — that is — we —

JONSON. [*Heartily, laughing, yet admiringly.*] Eh! catch his blush? The lad 's too modest to tell his own brave deeds.— What say'st, lads — we 'll act it out for him. 'T will make right stirring action; — this garden for the stage, the nodding flowers all about, an audience sweet to our impromptu play.—Diccon Burbage, thou famous crook-backed Richard, thou 'lt be the villain, Goole. I will represent the carrier. Thou art the prompter, Will. [*He briskly indicates their places, while* SHAKESPEARE *beckons* NICK *to him, who nods and whispers rapidly.*] And the rest of ye, the throngs upon the street. So! Art ready all? Now, lad and lass, remember Gregory Goole there hath kidnapped both of ye, and is a-spiriting ye off to France.

CICELY. [*Dancing around.*] Aye, that we will. [*As* NICK *whispers to* SHAKESPEARE *again.*] 'T will be a very play!

1 PLAYER [*as* GOOLE]. [*Since this actor is the one who has played the part of* GOOLE *in the preceding acts, the similitude is startlingly apparent*

now that he has resumed his former make-up and manner. As he finishes tying a bit of ribbon round one ear, after the manner of GOOLE:] "Take the other hand of her, thou jackanapes [*dragging* CICELY *by the hand*], and fetch a better pace than this — I 'll not be followed again."

CICELY. "Oh, Gregory, go slow!" [*Half panting. Half laughing.*]

JONSON. The cue, Will, the cue! [NICK *whispers to* JONSON.] — Aye,— Come here, ye idle passing throng! — Now: — "What there, Tom Webster, I say, seest yonder sweet princess?"

2 PLAYER. "My faith, Jem Armstrong, 't is the truth — for once in thy life. [*Staring at* CICELY.] Her face be as fair as a K in a copy-book. Hey, bullies, what? Let 's make her our Holiday Queen."

OTHER PLAYERS. "A Queen?"— "What queen?"— "Where is a queen?"— "I granny, Tom Webster hath catched a queen!"— "Where is she, Tom?"— "Up with her, mate, and let a fellow see."

1 PLAYER. [*Snarling.*] "Hands off there."

JONSON. "Up with her, then. A queen it is."

1 PLAYER. "Stand back, and let us pass.— Stand back, ye apprenticed rogues."

2 PLAYER. "Rogues? Rogues! Who calls us apprentices and rogues?"

3 PLAYER. "Crack me his brown, Martin Allston."

1 PLAYER. [*Faltering.*] "Good masters, I meant ye no offense. I prythee, do not keep a father and his children from their dying mother's bed."

JONSON. "Nay — is that so? Here, lads, give way — their mother be a-dying."

1 PLAYER. [*As others fall back.*] "Ah, sirs, she 'll thank ye with her dying breath.— Get on, thou knave." [*To* NICK.]

CICELY. [*To* SHAKESPEARE.] Oh, 't is very like the truth! — Now, Nick!

NICK. "The fellow lieth! My mother is in Stratford town; and Cicely's mother is dead."

1 PLAYER. "Thou whelp! [*As if to strike him.*] I 'll teach thee to hold thy tongue."

JONSON. "Oh, no, ye won't. [*Thrusting him away roughly.*] Dost take me? — say? — Now, Jacky Sprat, what 's all the coil about? Hath this sweet fellow kidnapped thee?"

NICK. "Nay, sir, not me, but Cicely; and do na leave him take her, sir, for he treats her very ill."

CICELY. [*Shivering.*] Oh, 't is much too true!

1 PLAYER. [*Sneering.*] "The little rascal lies. I am her legal guardian."

JONSON. "What! How? Thou wast her father but a moment since!"

SHAKESPEARE. [*As one of the crowd.*] Nay; her father's dearest friend, he said.

1 PLAYER. "Aye; her father's dearest friend, I said — he gave her in my charge."

CICELY. [*With spirit.*] "My father's friend! Thou? His common groom! Why, he would not give my little finger in thy charge."

SHAKESPEARE. He is the wiser daddy, then.

JONSON. [*Laughing.*] "Most true! Why, the fellow hath a T for Tyburn writ upon his face."

1 PLAYER. "Stand off. Thou 'lt pay the piper dear for this. The knave is a lying vagabond, and a thief as well."

CICELY. "Why, fie, for shame! [*Stamping her foot.*] Nick doth not steal, and thou knowest it, Gregory Goole. It is thou who hast stolen my pretty clothes, and the wine from my father's house."

SHAKESPEARE. Good, sweetheart.

JONSON. [*Eying* 1 PLAYER *sharply.*] "So the rascal hath stolen other things than thee? I thought that yellow bow of his was tied tremendous high. Why, mates, the dog is a branded rogue — that ribbon is tied through the hole in his ear. [JONSON *pursues* 1 PLAYER.] Hi!" [*The actor of* GOOLE *then stops, laughing, and, pulling the bit of ribbon from his ear, otherwise transforms himself into one of the throng.*]

JONSON. [*Returning, as himself, puffing.*] Good, lads, good!

SHAKESPEARE. 'T is well acted, all.

CICELY. Wait, sirs. I 'll dance the *coranto* as we danced it on our way.— Nick, call "Sa-sa!" and give me the time of the *coup d'archet?*

NICK. Aye; then, 't is off; 't is off! [*Snapping his fingers in time to the lilt of a lively tune he hums. She dances, a quaint running step, forward and back across the grass, balancing archly,*

with her hands upon her hips and a little smile upon her lips, in the swaying motion of the coupee, courtesying gracefully several times, and then bowing breathlessly at the end.]

JONSON. Why, Will, 't is fairy-like — she does not even touch the ground.

CICELY. [*Running to* NICK.] Was it all right, Nick?

NICK. [*Taking her hands.*] Right? 'T was better than thou didst ever dance before.

CICELY. [*With a quick light in her eyes.*] For why? for why? — because this time I danced for thee!

[*Enter* SIMON ATTWOOD, *up the path.* HEYWOOD *appears a moment later behind him, but stands unobtrusively in the background with the other players.*— CICELY *clings to* NICK'S *arm.* SHAKESPEARE *crosses over towards* SIMON, *who slowly comes into the center.* NICK *stands half-startled, half-eager, watching his father.*]

ATTWOOD. [*Hoarsely.*] Master Shakespeare, I ha' come about a matter — [*Stops.*]

SHAKESPEARE. In truth, there is much the matter.

ATTWOOD. I ha' summat to say to thee.

SHAKESPEARE. There is much here needs be said.

JONSON. Out with it, then.

ATTWOOD. [*Looking around slowly.*] There 's naught that I can say, but that I be sorry, and I want my son.— Nick! Nick! [*falters brokenly*] I be wrung for thee; will ye na come home — just for thy mother's sake, Nick, if na for mine?

NICK. [*Starting up with a glad cry.*] Father! [*Seeing* CICELY *at his side, he stops.*] But Cicely?

ATTWOOD. [*Wringing his hat within his hands — then stoutly.*] Bring her along. I ha' little enow; but we 'll make out, lad, we 'll make out. [*Holding out his hands.*] Wilt come, lad?

NICK. [*Walking over to him, blindly.*] Oh, Father!

[SIMON ATTWOOD *holds him closely and caressingly.* SHAKESPEARE, *with his arm about* CICELY, *turns and makes a sign to* JONSON. JONSON *nods, and goes into the house, reappearing instantly with two bags of bright yellow buckskin, which he holds behind his back.*]

ATTWOOD. [*As* NICK *looks up into his face, curiously.*] Well, lad, what be it?

NICK. [*Smiling.*] Nothing, only Mother will be glad to have Cicely, won't she?

SHAKESPEARE. I have a little story to tell ye all. [*All surprised, except* JONSON, *who smiles knowingly.*] — When I went to see Gaston Carew seeking news of the missing boy, he made known to me a secret panel in the wainscot of his house, wherein was hidden all he had on earth to leave to those he loved the best, and who, he hoped, loved him.

CICELY. [*Aside to* SHAKESPEARE.] Everybody loves my father.

SHAKESPEARE. [*Putting his hand for a moment gently on her head.*] He sent his love forever to his only daughter Cicely [CICELY *nods and smiles*], and then he said he trusted me to see this little fortune safe bestowed. [*Slowly.*] This done, we parted. [*Pauses.*] Within the wall, as he had said, we found these bags [*takes them from* JONSON], one marked "For my beloved daughter Cicely," and the other, "For Nicholas Attwood." [*Turns to* ATTWOOD, *smiling genially.*] Four hundred fifty gold rose-nobles. Neighbor Attwood, we shall have no paupers here!

[*Clapping of hands, as he places the bags in* SIMON'S *hands.*] And what is more, I 'll need a tenant for this Place while I 'm away at London. What say you, Attwood? Wilt be my man?

CICELY. [*Going to* NICK, *quickly.*] Now I can stay with thee till Daddy comes, and be thine own sister forever.

ATTWOOD. [*Brokenly.*] Why, sir — why, sirs, all of ye — I ha' been a hard man, and summat of a fool, sirs. I ha' misthought and miscalled ye play-actors many and many a time; but, God knoweth well, I be sorry for it from the bottom o' my heart. [*Hangs his head.*]

SHAKESPEARE. [*Crossing, and putting his hand on the tanner's shoulder.*] Nay, Simon Attwood, thou hast only been mistaken, that is all. And to see thyself mistaken is but to be the wiser. Why, never the wisest man but saw himself a fool a thousand times.

JONSON. Come, Neighbor Attwood, sit thee up and eat with us.

ATTWOOD. I thank ye, sirs. Ye ha' all been good to my boy. But, masters, I 'll go home to my wife. There be things to say before my boy comes home; and I ha' muckle need to tell her

that I love her — I ha' na done so these many years.

JONSON. Why, Will, 't is altogether like a Midsummer Night's Dream.

SHAKESPEARE. Aye, Ben; and 't is a good place to end, where all ends well.— Come, Neighbor, do not go at least until thou drinkest one good toast with us, for we are all good friends and true from this day forth.— Come, Ben, a toast to fit the cue.

JONSON. Why, then,— here 's to all kind hearts!

SHAKESPEARE. Wherever they may be!— 'T is a good toast, and we will drink it all together.

JONSON. [*Going over to* NICK, *as* SHAKESPEARE *pours out the glasses.*] Nick, my lad, sing some words for me? [*Whispers some words to him.*]

OTHERS. [*Calling.*] Master Skylark!— Yes, the Skylark!— Sing for us now.

SHAKESPEARE. Yes, Nicholas!

CICELY. Aye, Nick!

NICK. [*Sings:*]

Then here 's a health to all kind hearts
Wherever they may be;
For kindly hearts make but one kin
Of all humanity.

And here 's a rouse to all kind hearts
Wherever they be found;
For 't is the throb of kindred hearts
Doth make the world go round.

[*As all raise their glasses,* NICK *having now stepped behind the others — enter* MARGARET ATTWOOD, *hurriedly, by the path.*]

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Your pardon, kind sirs, but Anne Shakespeare hath said — Why, Simon, what hath come over thee? What hath happened?

ATTWOOD. Naught, lass, but that our lad is coming home, and that I love thee. Is it too late to tell thee so?

MARGARET ATTWOOD. Nay, Simon, 't is never too late to mend. But [*turns*] — oh, *Nick!*

NICK. [*Running to her arms.*] Mother! Oh, Mother dear!

CICELY. [*Going affectionately to* ATTWOOD, *who holds out his arms pleadingly to her.*] Oh,

she will be my mother, too! And thou my foster daddy!

MARGARET ATTWOOD. My boy, my boy!—my little boy!

[CURTAIN]

[End of ACT V]

ALTERNATIVE FIFTH ACT.

Abbreviated to one half the original version.

ACT V

[SHAKESPEARE'S *garden, at New Place, Stratford. Five days later. Early morning; pinkish light.*

The "Great House" at back of stage, with gable end in the center, and windows each side. Paths to left and right. Rose-trees and shrubbery and a little arbor in the foreground. A table, sheltered under a tree, with fruit, trays of nuts and raisins and little cakes, silver cups and decanters set thereon. A bench and two stools elsewhere.

SHAKESPEARE *discovered, partly hidden among the bushes, with a pair of pruning-shears, trimming the rose-trees.*

A casement in the gable opens wide, and HEYWOOD'S *head and shoulders appear. His head is bandaged; but this bandage is concealed later when he puts his hat on.*]

SHAKESPEARE. Good morrow, Master Early-bird! [*Tosses him a rose.*] Hast rested well?

HEYWOOD. Aye, Will. [*Sunlight strikes the gable.*] 'T would be a lovely day if the Skylark were here to sing.

SHAKESPEARE. Yet, truly, Tom, so fair a morning cannot bring foul news.— Ah! [*Stretching himself to his full height and laughing softly.*] It is the sweetest music in the world — morning, spring, and God's dear sunshine; it bringeth hope, fills full the soul, starts kindness brewing in the heart, like sap in a withered bud. Thank God for life!

JONSON. [*Entering from the house.*] What news, Will, from thy daybreak messenger?

SHAKESPEARE. There 's naught found yet. But he reporteth they cannot be in London, for 't is sure they left with the carrier for Coventry the day before Goole was found drowned in the Thames by Barge-house Stairs.

JONSON. So!— Where 's Burbage and the rest?

SHAKESPEARE. Gone for an appetizing walk, old hurly-burly Ben, whilst thou lay snoozing the dew-gemmed hours away. Art sure thou 'rt yet awake?

JONSON. Ah, Will, thou gentle rogue! [*Catching his hands.*] How thou stealest one's

heart with the glance of thine eye! One look of thine doth warm the soul.

HEYWOOD. [*As the sound of voices comes up the path.*] Here 's Burbage and the rest.

1 PLAYER. [*Entering briskly, with others.*] News, Will! Great news!

2 PLAYER. Jove! the best that was ever baked.

SHAKESPEARE. Hast found them?

1 PLAYER. Aye, that we have. They 're here! They lodged o'er night at Warwick, having trudged from Coventry.

2 PLAYER. The weekly carrier fetched them to Coventry on yester-noon.

JONSON. Where be they now?

1 PLAYER. Hard by the lane to Simon Attwood's.— The lad sent thee his love and will come soon, he saith, to see thee here.

SHAKESPEARE. I warrant ye.— 'T is good we kept our former news from Margaret Attwood now.

HEYWOOD. [*Who has just disappeared from the window, to reappear now, among the others.*] Hey! what a feast we 'll have!

JONSON. Why, Will, we 'll doubly celebrate thy purchase of this New Place here. 'T will be revelry most rare.

SHAKESPEARE. But look! [*Enter* NICK *and* CICELY, hand in hand.] The children! [*All move towards them.* SHAKESPEARE *meets them with outstretched hands.*] Welcome, most welcome, Nicholas and Cicely.

JONSON. Lad, thou 'rt a credit to this old town of thine.

HEYWOOD. A plucky fellow, Nick, I say, right plucky to bring the lass safe too.

NICK. [*To* HEYWOOD.] Then Gregory did na kill thee, sir?

HEYWOOD. Nay, lad; thank God, he missed his aim.

JONSON. [*To* CICELY.] And thou art Gaston's little daughter. Why, lass, I knew thy father well.

SHAKESPEARE. [*To* NICK.] Thou young rogue, how thou hast forestalled us! Why, here we have been weeping for thee as lost or stolen again; and all the while thou wert coming straight to thine own sweet nest. How is thy beloved mother?

NICK. I ha' na seen my mother, sir. Father will na let me in.

SHAKESPEARE. Eh; what?

NICK. He was working in the yard, and he — he said he was na father to stage-playing, vagabond rogues; and closed the gate upon us both.

CICELY. He is a wicked, wicked man!

NICK. He is my father, Cicely.

CICELY. And thou dost hate *my* father so? Oh, Nick! — [*To* JONSON.] He said he 'd set the constables on us if we would not be gone!

[2 PLAYER *brings up two stools for them to sit upon.*]

HEYWOOD. Why, this is a sorry tale. Doth he not know thou 'rt kept against thy will?

NICK. He will na leave me tell him. He would na even listen. He saith I 'll never be his son again.

JONSON. The muckle shrew! Why, thou hadst best disown him! — We 'll read him reason with a vengeance.— What say'st, Will? We 'll take the children for our own — thou one, I t' other — and by praiseworthy fostering singe this sullen fellow's very brain with shame.

Heywood. Why, here, Ben Jonson, wait. Pray, where do I come in?

Others. [*Respectively.*] Or I? — Or I? — Don't leave us out.

Shakespeare. [*Smiling.*] Aye. 'T is a pity if we cannot all stand together in this real play as well as in the make-believe.— Kind hearts are trumps — make it a stock company, and let us all be in.

Jonson. Well, Tom, we cannot bar thee out.— Ye know, lads, Heywood comes to us, now that — [Shakespeare *checks him, warningly*] — now that his contract with Carew binds him no more.

Others. Hurrah! — Good, Tom!

1 Player. With Will and Ben for meat and crust, Tom Heywood for the sauce, and us for seasoning, the Court shall say it never ate such master-pie!

2 Player. Here 's a toast to the twinkling trio, the Queen's immortal stars!

3 Player. [*As all seize cups of wine.*] And a health to our new Lord Chamberlain!

1 Player. Here 's to the company all!

Heywood. And here 's to lad and lass!

SHAKESPEARE. [*Most solemnly and slowly.*] To Gaston Carew! [*One or two cross themselves quickly, while lifting their glasses; some bow their heads. There is a sudden hush. Then, brightly, but with deep feeling still:*]

JONSON. And then — God save the Queen! [*All drink.*] — And, Will, besides his song, the lad will make a better *Rosalind* than Roger Prynne, for thy new play.

SHAKESPEARE. So he would. But before we put him into "As You Like It," suppose we ask him how he would like it.— Nick, thou hast heard what all these gentlemen have said — what hast thou to say, my lad?

NICK. Why, sirs, ye are all very kind — very kind indeed; but — I — I just want to go home, sirs; — oh, masters, I do want to see my mother!

SHAKESPEARE. [*Drawing* NICK *to him, comfortingly, as* HEYWOOD *slips out by the path, making a significant gesture.*] We 'll take thee home soon. All will be well, in time; in God's good time.— But, come, tell us, Nick, how fared ye both with Goole?

NICK. [*As the others gather round.*] Why, sirs, 't were not so much to tell. Only —

CICELY. Only Nick was most brave and kind through all — a very prince.

JONSON. Good, sweetheart! And thou the princess then.

NICK. Gregory kept us locked up in a horrible place, by the river bank, where all was dirty alleyways and wharf-sheds, and people past description — cold, cruel folk.

CICELY. I canna bear to think of them! [*Shudders, shrinking close to* JONSON, *who puts his arm around her protectingly, smiling in his big way.*]

SHAKESPEARE. And how did ye escape?

NICK. 'T was this way, sir.— He took us out next morning, bound, he said, to flee away to France; but on the way we met a crowd of 'prentices out for a holiday. When they caught sight of Cicely they called to us to stop; said they must kiss so fair a maid.—

JONSON. Truly, though I fain would have said them nay, I do not wonder at their wish. [*Laughs.*] Eh! catch the blushes?

NICK. Then, sire, said Gregory, " Stand back, and let us pass. Wouldst keep a father and his children from their dying mother's bed? "

CICELY. Then Nick cried out most manfully, "The fellow lieth! My mother is in Stratford town; and Cicely's mother is dead."

NICK. Then Gregory tried to hit me, but at that they all closed in, and some of them struck him sorely as he fled away. Some others went with us to the carrier's wagon-train, which was about to start.

JONSON. Brave little lad and lass.

CICELY. I let them kiss my hand, but first I made them wipe their faces clean.

NICK. She danced the *coranto* for them.

CICELY. And I 'll dance it now as I danced for them, Nick, if thou wilt call "Sa-sa!" and give me the time of the *coup d'archet.*

NICK. Aye; then, 't is off, 't is off! [*Snapping his fingers in time to the lilt of a lively tune he hums. She dances, a quaint running step, forward and backward across the grass, balancing archly, with her hands upon her hips and a little smile upon her lips, in the swaying motion of the coupee, courtesying gracefully several times,* and *then bowing breathlessly at the end.*]

JONSON. Why, Will, 't is fairy-like — she does not even touch the ground.

CICELY. [*Who has run to* NICK *at once, disregarding the applause of the others.*] Was it all right, Nick?

NICK. [*Taking her hands.*] 'T was better than thou didst ever dance before.

CICELY. [*With a quick light in her eyes.*] For why? for why? — because this time I danced for thee!

[*Enter* SIMON ATTWOOD, *up the path.* HEYWOOD *appears a moment later behind him, but standing unobtrusively in the background with the other players.* — CICELY *clings to* NICK'S *arm.* SHAKESPEARE *crosses over towards* SIMON, *who slowly comes into the center.* NICK *stands half-startled, half-eager, watching his father.*]

ATTWOOD. [*Hoarsely.*] Master Shakespeare, I ha' come about a matter — [*Stops.*]

SHAKESPEARE. In truth, there is much the matter.

ATTWOOD. I ha' summat to say to thee.

SHAKESPEARE. There is much here needs be said.

ATTWOOD. [*Looking around slowly.*] There 's naught that I can say, but that I be sorry, and

I want my son.— Nick! Nick! [*falters brokenly*] I be wrung for thee; will ye na come home for thy mother's sake, if na for mine?

NICK. [*Starting up with a glad cry.*] Father! [*Seeing* CICELY *at his side, he stops.*] But Cicely?

ATTWOOD. [*Wringing his hat within his hands — then stoutly.*] Bring her along. I ha' little enow; but we 'll make out, lad, we 'll make out. [*Holding out his hands.*]

NICK. [*Rushing over to him, blindly.*] Father!

[SIMON ATTWOOD *holds him closely and caressingly.* SHAKESPEARE, *with his arm about* CICELY, *turns and makes a sign to* JONSON. *The latter nods, and goes into the house, reappearing instantly with two bags of bright yellow buckskin, which he holds behind his back.*]

ATTWOOD. [*As* NICK *looks up into his face.*] Well, lad, what be it?

NICK. [*Smiling.*] Mother will be glad to have Cicely, won't she?

SHAKESPEARE. I have a little story to tell ye all. [JONSON *smiles knowingly at* CICELY.]

When I went to Gaston Carew for news of the missing boy, he made known to me a secret panel in the wainscot of his house, wherein was hidden all he had on earth to leave to those he loved the best, and who, he hoped, loved him.

CICELY. [*Softly, and confidently.*] Everybody loves my father.

SHAKESPEARE. [*Putting his hand for a moment gently on her head.*] He sent his love forever to his only daughter Cicely [CICELY *nods and smiles*], and he trusted me to see this little fortune safe bestowed. [*Slowly.*] This done, we parted.— [*Pauses.*] — Within the wall, as he had said, we found these bags [*takes them from* JONSON], one marked "For my beloved daughter Cicely," and the other, "For Nicholas Attwood!" [*Turns to* ATTWOOD, *smiling genially, and places the bags in* SIMON'S *hands.*] Four hundred fifty gold rose-nobles. Neighbor Attwood, we shall have no paupers here! [*Clapping of hands.*] And what is more, I need a tenant for this Place while I 'm away in London. What say you, Simon Attwood? Wilt be my man?

CICELY. [*Going to* NICK, *quickly.*] Now I can stay with thee till Daddy comes, and be thine own sister forever.

ATTWOOD. [*Brokenly.*] Why, sir — why, sirs, all o' ye — I ha' been a hard man, and summat of a fool. I ha' misthought and miscalled ye play-actors many and many a time; but, God knoweth, I be sorry for it from the bottom o' my heart.

SHAKESPEARE. [*Putting his hand on the tanner's shoulder.*] Nay, Simon Attwood, thou hast only been mistaken, that is all. And to see thyself mistaken is but to be the wiser. Why, never the wisest man but saw himself a fool a thousand times.

JONSON. Come, Neighbor tanner, sit thee up and eat with us.

ATTWOOD. I thank ye, sirs. Ye ha' all been good to my boy. But, masters, I 'll go home to my wife. There be things to say before my boy comes home; and I ha' muckle need to tell her that I love her.— I ha' na done so these many years.

JONSON. Why, Will, 't is altogether like a Midsummer Night's Dream.

SHAKESPEARE. Aye, Ben; and 't is a good place to end, where all end's well.— Come, Neighbor, do not go at least until thou drinkest one good toast with us, for we are all good friends and true

from this day forth.— Come, Ben, a toast to fit the cue.

JONSON. Why, then — here's to all kind hearts!

SHAKESPEARE. Wherever they may be! — 'T is a good toast, and we will drink it all together.

JONSON. [*Going over to* NICK, *as* SHAKESPEARE *pours out the glasses.*] Nick, my lad, sing some words for me? [*Whispers some words* to him.]

OTHERS. [*Calling.*] Master Skylark! — Yes, the Skylark.— Sing for us now.

SHAKESPEARE. Aye, Nicholas!

CICELY. Nick, dear!

NICK. [*Singing:*]

Then here 's a health to all kind hearts
Wherever they may be;
For kindly hearts make but one kin
Of all humanity.

And here's a rouse to all kind hearts
Wherever they be found;
For 't is the throb of kindred hearts
Doth make the world go round.